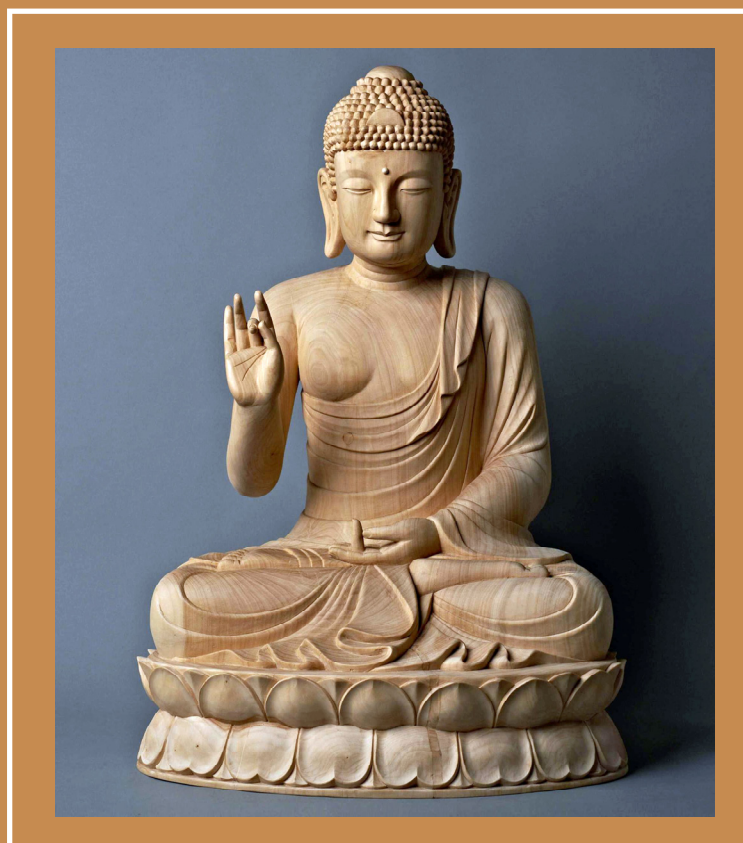


CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP

# BEYOND BELIEF

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A BUDDHIST CRITIQUE OF  
FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANITY



*Original Author*

**A. L. De Silva**

*Revised and edited by*

**Allan R. Bomhard**

Basic / Introductory Series



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CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP  
Charleston, SC USA

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In preparing the Charleston Buddhist Fellowship version of this work, substantial portions were rewritten, some parts were removed, and new material was added. Diacritics were added to Pāli terms and references.

*The doctrinal positions expressed in this book are those of Theravādin Buddhism.*

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# Christian Evangelism: Whither Decency?

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Harendra De Silva  
(from LankaWeb [2006])

The world (or more correctly, the West) appears infatuated with “Muslim fanaticism.” We are told over and over again that Islam preaches fanaticism and that Muslims are allegedly violent and have a blind hatred of non-Muslims. But really, how true are these vacuous claims? They are stories made to justify violent attacks on the Muslim community around the world and take attention away from those who really harbor ill-will against followers of other religions. The media has not given enough attention to the insidious campaign that is taking place this very minute to reduce and wipeout Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and the various other religious traditions that are followed by large sections of humanity.

When I look around, the only people I see trying to wipe out other religions and other peoples’ belief systems are the Christian evangelists and their loud supporters. I have never ever encountered a Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim preacher barging in on my privacy and pushing their holy books in my face, nor have I seen Buddhists, Hindus, or Muslims set up organizations purely for the sake of converting others through hook and crook. Despite having a similar religious heritage, we can clearly see that it is the Christian evangelists who are the real religious extremists, and not the Muslims, as loudly claimed by various sections of the media.

Christian evangelism today does not appear to have any respect for cultural and religious diversity. Its aim is to wipe out all non-Christian cultural and religious traditions and replace them with Christianity — more often than not the Western version of it, which has very little in common with the country or society it is targeting. Many tribal societies across the world have lost their heritage and are in the process of losing them due to the activities of these evangelists. In refusing to see the good in other religions and other ways-of-life, Christian evangelists take on an extremely fundamentalist position that is an affront not only to non-Christians, but to moderate Christians as well.

I am often quite amazed and plainly shocked at the fanatical zeal shown by these Christian evangelists, who wish to convert the entire world to Christianity through whatever means necessary. Entire organizations, or more correctly enterprises, have been set up with the sole purpose of “harvesting souls for God,” and there are many individuals whose job in life is to convert non-Christians to Christianity, and they are paid handsomely to do it. No expense is spared in this task of trying to bring every single person on planet earth to the “light of Jesus Christ,” and no thought whatsoever is given to the religious and cultural diversity that makes this world such a wonderful place.

For these extremists, the sooner all the non-Christian “pagan” and “Satan-inspired” religions perish or are annihilated, the better the world will be; a rather fanatical, naziesque position if there ever was one. By sending evangelist teams around the world and setting up shop in non-Christian majority countries, these evangelist organizations work to destroy the pillars of religious coexistence and tolerance and erect their own pillars of religious supremacy and intolerance in those countries. And Sri Lanka is just another one of their many targets —

yet another country “infested with evil pagans” who need to be brought to the “light of Jesus Christ.”

With the kind of mentality explained above, these evangelists have no qualms about using whatever means necessary to gain converts. As they have invaded countries that may not be wealthy, and as is the case in Sri Lanka, they use material inducements to convert the poor and destitute non-Christians to Christianity. For them, buying souls for their God is not an issue, but the tally of supposedly “saved souls” is. Conversion today has become a big business with big bucks behind it, and, unfortunately, the world we live in appears a battleground for the Christian evangelists, where the competitors are not only the non-Christian religions but rival Christian sects as well.

And to them, all is fair in war. Encouraging new converts to smash statues of the Buddha and Hindu gods and goddesses, burn pictures of the Buddha and Hindu gods and goddesses, burn Dharma books and renounce “pagan” cultural activities are all considered suitable methods of propagating Christianity. Giving potential child converts biscuits fashioned in the shape of a Buddha image and encouraging the kids to eat them while preaching Christianity do not strike the evangelists as insensitive and indecent. And following in the footsteps of the colonials in Sri Lanka, these cash-rich evangelists offer food, money, and employment to convince poor Sri Lankans to convert to Christianity, asserting that it is the Christian God that is the harbinger of prosperity and that it is the “Satan-inspired” Buddhist/Hindu/Muslim traditions that continue to keep them in poverty.

It is no wonder that many Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and moderate Christians are simply appalled at the way the evangelists carry out their proselytism and are extremely worried about the impact it will have on religious harmony in this country. It can already be seen that the provocative activities of Christian evangelists have led to the destabilization of peace and harmony among the various religious communities, and, if these evangelists continue with their unethical and iconoclastic methods of proselytism, the situation is bound to get worse. Sri Lanka could very well do without these people, who are hell-bent on creating a religious imbroglio in this beautiful island.

Christian evangelists in Sri Lanka and the greater Asian region need to reconsider their unethical and aggressive methods of proselytism. They need to start according respect to other systems of belief instead of treating them as sworn enemies. The current mentality that drives proselytism, as well as the actual methods of proselytism employed by the evangelists, are going against accepted norms of decency and are creating a negative image of Christianity at large.

By caring naught for religious harmony in Sri Lanka, Christian evangelists are doing this country a huge disfavor. And, as Sri Lankans, we cannot sit idly by and watch the religious harmony which we treasure so much disintegrate before our very eyes. We cannot afford to ignore the threat unethical and aggressive evangelism poses to peace and harmony in this country. To do so would mean the victory of fundamentalism and intolerance.

So there is an important question that we must ask ourselves: when will the ideological and iconoclastic war waged by Christian evangelists against the Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims of this country end? Because, as long as the evangelists wage a war to dismantle and/or destroy Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in this country, there can never be true religious harmony. A predator-prey relationship is not conducive to peace and is always marked by stress. This is especially the case for the prey. The predatory desire to see other religions perish and to have Christianity “triumph” over these other religions cannot be condoned and should never be condoned by anyone with a sense of decency. It is a



fundamentalist position that is not in tune with our culture and way of life, which gives priority to religious harmony and religious tolerance.

Religious pluralism is what Sri Lanka is about, and the evangelists want to destroy that. We cannot and must not let them succeed. ■



# Preface

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This book has three goals:

1. First, this book aims to critically examine the fundamentalist approach to Christianity and highlight its many logical, philosophical, and ethical problems. In doing so, I hope to be able to provide Buddhists with facts which they can use when Christians try to convert them to Christianity. This book should help make such encounters more evenhanded and, hopefully, also make it more likely that Buddhists will keep their faith. As it is, many Buddhists know little about their own religion and nothing about Christianity, which makes it difficult for them to refute the claims Christians make or answer questions they ask about Buddhism.
2. The second goal of this book is to help Christians who might read it to help them understand why some people are not and will never be Christians. Hopefully, this understanding will help them develop an acceptance of and, thereby, a genuine friendship with non-Christians, rather than relating to them only as either lost souls or potential converts. In order to do this, I have raised as many difficulties about Christianity as possible. If it appears at times that I have been hard on Christianity, I hope this will not be taken as motivated by malice. Rather, it is a sincere attempt to address the claim made by Christians that their religion alone is true, for, when doing so, Christians must be prepared to answer legitimate doubts which others might express about Christian beliefs.
3. The third aim of this book is to awaken in Buddhists a deeper appreciation of their own religion. In some Buddhist countries, Buddhism is thought of as an outdated superstition, while Christianity is seen as a religion which has all the answers. As these countries become more Westernized, Christianity, with its alleged “modern image”, begins to look increasingly attractive. I think this book will amply demonstrate that Buddhism is able to ask questions of Christianity which it has great difficulty answering and, at the same time, offer explanations to life’s puzzles which make Christian explanations look rather inadequate.

Some Buddhists may object to a book like this, believing that a gentle and tolerant religion like Buddhism should refrain from criticizing other religions. This is certainly not what the Buddha Himself taught. In the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (The Great Passing), the Buddha said that His disciples should be able to “Teach the *Dhamma*, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyze it, make it clear, and be able by means of the *Dhamma* to refute false teachings that have arisen”. Subjecting a point of view to careful scrutiny and criticism has an important part to play in helping to separate truth from falsehood so that we can be in a better position to choose between competing claims. Criticism of other religions only becomes inappropriate when it is based on deliberate misrepresentation or when it descends into an exercise in ridicule and name-calling. I hope I have avoided doing this. ■



# 1

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## Christian Arguments for God's Existence

Christians claim that there is an all-knowing, all-loving God who created and controls the universe. Several arguments are used to try to prove this idea. We will examine each of these arguments and give Buddhist objections to them.

*The first thing to realize, if you wish to become a philosopher, is that most people go through life with a whole world of beliefs that have no sort of rational justification, and that one man's world of beliefs is apt to be incompatible with another man's, so that they cannot both be right. People's opinions are mainly designed to make them feel comfortable; truth, for most people, is a secondary consideration. — Bertrand Russell*

### The Authority of the Bible

When asked to prove that God exists, Christians will point to the Bible and say that it is the best proof of God's existence. The problem is that, if we ask a Hindu, a Moslem, a Sikh, or a Jain the same question, they too will point to their respective holy books as proof of the existence of their gods. But why should we believe the Bible and not the holy books of other religions? Using the Bible to prove God's existence is only valid if we already accept that it alone contains God's words. However, we have no evidence that this is so. In fact, as we will demonstrate later, there is strong evidence that the Bible is a highly unreliable document.

### The Existence of the Universe

In their attempts to prove God's existence, Christians will sometimes say that the universe did not just happen, someone must have made it, and, therefore, there must be a creator God. There is a major flaw in this argument. When it starts to rain, we do not ask, "Who is making it rain?" because we know that rain is not caused by someone but by something — natural phenomena like heat, evaporation, precipitation, etc. When we see smooth stones in a river, we do not ask, "Who polished these stones?" because we know that their smooth surface was not caused by someone but by something — natural causes like the abrasive action of water and sand.

All these things have a natural cause or causes — none of them was caused by the actions of a supernatural being. It is the same with the universe — it was not brought into existence by a

god but by natural phenomena. However, even if we insist that a supernatural being is needed to explain how the universe came into existence, what proof is there that it was the Christian God? Perhaps it was a Hindu God, the God of Islam, or one of the gods worshipped by tribal religions who created it. Christianity is not the only religion to claim that there is a creator god or gods.

### **The Argument from Design**

In response to the above refutation, Christians will claim that the universe not only exists but that its existence shows perfect design. There is, a Christian might say, an order and balance in the universe which point to its having been designed by a higher intelligence and that this higher intelligence is God. But as before, there are some problems with this argument. First, how does the Christian know that it was his God who was behind creation? Perhaps it was the gods of non-Christian religions who designed and created the universe. Second, how does the Christian know that only one God designed everything? In fact, since the universe is so intricate and complex, we could expect it to need the intelligence of several, perhaps dozens, of gods to design it. So if anything, the argument from design could be used to prove that there are many gods, not one as Christians claim.

Next, we would have to ask whether the universe really is perfectly designed. We must ask this question because it is only natural to expect a perfect God to design a perfect universe. Let us look first at inanimate phenomena to see whether they show perfect design. Rain gives us pure water to drink, but sometimes it rains too much and people lose their lives, their homes, and their means of livelihood in floods. At other times, it does not rain at all and millions die because of drought and famine. Is this perfect design? The mountains give us joy as we see them reaching up into the sky. But landslides and volcanic eruptions have caused havoc and death for millennia. Is this perfect design? The gentle breezes cool us, but storms and tornados repeatedly cause death and destruction. Is this perfect design? These and other natural calamities prove that inanimate phenomena do not exhibit perfect design and, therefore, that they were not created by a perfect God.

Now let us look at animate phenomena. At a superficial glance, nature seems to be beautiful and harmonious; all creatures are provided for, and each has its task to perform. However, nature is utterly ruthless, as any biologist or careful observer will confirm. To live, each creature has to feed on other creatures and struggle to avoid being itself eaten by yet other creatures. In nature, there is no room for pity, love, or mercy. If a loving God really designed everything, why did such a cruel design result? But the natural world is not only imperfect in the ethical sense, it is also imperfect in that it often goes wrong. Every year, millions of babies are born with physical or mental disabilities, are stillborn, or die soon after birth. Why would a perfect creator God design such terrible things? So, if there is a design in the universe, much of it is either cruel or faulty. This indicates that the universe was not created by a perfect, loving God.

*If there is a designer, he must take credit for the flaws in his creation. Flaws in the creation directly reflect flaws in the creator. If there is a flaw in the creator, then he cannot be all powerful. — David Hume*

## **The First Cause Argument**

Christians will sometimes say that everything has a cause, that there must be a first cause, and that God is the first cause. This old argument contains its own refutation because, if everything has a cause, then the alleged “first cause” must also have a cause. There is another problem with the first cause argument. Logically, there is absolutely no reason to assume that everything that exists had a single first cause. Perhaps six, ten, or several hundred causes occurring simultaneously caused everything. And as before, even if we accept the necessity of a first cause, what proof is there that it was the Christian God? None.

## **Miracles**

Christians claim that miracles are sometimes performed in God's name and that this proves he exists. However, this argument loses credibility when looked at a little more closely. While Christians are quick to claim that, because of their prayers, the blind can see, the deaf can hear, and crooked limbs can be straightened, they are very slow in producing hard evidence to substantiate their claims. In fact, Christians are so anxious to prove that miracles have occurred that the truth often gets lost in a flood of wild claims, extravagant boasts, and sometimes even conscious lies.

However, things that appear to be unusual or that are difficult to explain do sometimes happen during religious events, but not just for Christians. Hindus, Moslems, Jews, Sikhs, Jains, etc. all claim that their God or gods sometimes perform miracles as well. Christianity does not have a monopoly on miracles. Accordingly, if, as claimed, miracles performed in God's name prove that he exists, then miracles performed in the name of the numerous other gods must likewise prove that they exist too.

Christians try to deny this fact by claiming that, when miracles occur in other religions, they are done through the power of the Devil. Perhaps the best way to counter this claim is to quote the Bible. When Jesus healed the sick, his enemies accused him of doing this through the power of the Devil. He answered by saying that healing the sick results in good and that, if the Devil went around doing good, he would destroy himself (Mk. 3:22—26). Surely, the same could be said for the miracles performed by the God or gods of the Hindus, Moslems, Jews, Sikhs, Jains, etc. If the miracles they do result in good, how can they be the work of the Devil?

## **The Argument for God's Necessity**

Christians often claim that only by believing in God can people have the strength to deal with life's problems and, therefore, that belief in God is necessary. This claim is apparently supported by numerous books written by Christians who have endured and overcome various crises through their faith in God. Some of these books make highly inspiring reading, so the claim that one can cope with problems only with God's help sounds rather convincing — until we look a little more deeply.

If this claim were true, we would expect that most non-Christians in the world would be leading lives of emotional distress, confusion, and hopelessness, while most Christians, through their faith in God, would be able to unfailingly deal with their problems and would never need to

seek help from counselors or psychologists. It is clear, however, that people who follow non-Christian religions and even those with no religion are just as capable of dealing with life's problems as Christians are — sometimes even better. It is also sometimes true that people who have been devout Christians lose their faith in God after being confronted with serious personal problems. Consequently, the claim that belief in God is necessary to cope with and overcome problems is baseless.

### **The “Try and Disprove” Argument**

When Christians find that they cannot prove their God's existence with dubious facts or faulty logic, they may switch tactics and say that perhaps they cannot prove that their God exists, but you cannot disprove it either. This, of course, is quite true. You cannot prove that their God does not exist — but you cannot prove that the gods of other religions do not exist either. In other words, despite all the hyperbole, the extravagant claims, and confident proclamations, there is no more evidence for the existence of the Christian God than there is for the gods worshipped by other religions.

*If fifty million people believe a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing.* — Anatole France

### **The Testimony**

After everything else has failed, Christians may try to convince us that God exists by appealing to our emotions. They may say, perhaps quite sincerely, something like, “I used to be unhappy and discontented, but after giving myself to God [or Jesus Christ], I am happy and at peace with myself”. Such testimonies can be deeply moving, but what do they prove? There are millions of people whose lives became equally happy and meaningful after they embraced Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, or some other religion — even atheism. Likewise, there are no doubt many people whose lives have not changed for the better after they became Christians — the same weaknesses and problems may remain or even become worse. So this argument, like all the others, does not prove the existence of the Christian God. ■



# 2

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## Why God Cannot Exist

In the preceding chapter, we saw that the arguments used to prove God's existence are inadequate. We will now show that, logically, an all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God such as the one in which Christians believe cannot exist.

### The Problem of Free Will

For the religious life to be meaningful, we must have free will, and we must be able to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. If we do not have free will, we cannot be held responsible for what we do.

According to Christianity, God is all-knowing — he knows all the past, all the present, and all the future. If this is so, then he must know everything we do long before we do it. This means that our whole life must be predetermined and that we act not according to the free exercise of our wills but according to preprogrammed scripts. If all that we do is predetermined to be good, we will be good, and if we are predetermined to be evil, we will be evil. We will act not according to our will or choice but according to the way that God has already determined we will act. Although Christians insist that we do have free will, God's omniscience simply makes this logically impossible. The Bible also makes it clear that everything people do — good or evil — is all due to the will of God (for example, 2 Thess. 2:11—12; Rom. 9:19—21; Rom. 9:18).

If people are evil, it is because God has chosen to make them evil (Rom. 1:24—28) and caused them to disobey him (Rom. 11:32). If they do not understand God's message, it is because he has made their minds dull (Rom. 11:8) and caused them to be stubborn (Rom. 9:18). God prevents the Gospel from being preached in certain areas (Acts 16:6—7), and he fixes long before it will happen when a person will be born and when he or she will die (Acts 17:26). Those who were going to be saved were chosen by God before the beginning of time (2 Tim. 1:9). If a person has faith and is thereby saved, their faith comes from God, not from any effort or decision on their part (Eph. 2:9—10). Now, one may ask, "If we can only do what God predetermines us to do, how can he hold us responsible for our actions?" The Bible has an answer for this question:

*But one of you will say to me: "If this is so, how can God find fault with anyone? For who can resist God's will?" But who are you, my friend, to answer God back? A clay pot does not ask the man who made it: "Why did you make me like this?" After all, the man who makes the pot has the right to use the clay as he wishes, and to make two pots*

*from one lump of clay, one for special occasions and one for ordinary use. And the same is true of what God has done. (Rom. 9:19—22.)*

So apparently in Christianity, a person's life and destiny are due purely to the whim of God and, as mere humans, we have no right to complain about what he has decided for us. The idea that all our actions are predetermined is quite consistent with the idea of an all-knowing God, but it makes a mockery of the concept of free will.

## **The Problem of Evil**

Perhaps the most potent argument against the existence of an all-powerful and all-loving God is the undeniable fact that there is so much pain and suffering in the world. If there really is a God of love who has unlimited power, why does he not put an end to all this evil? Christians try to answer this difficult question in several ways.

First, Christians will say that evil is caused by humans and not by God and that, if only we would follow God's commandments, there would be no pain, evil, or suffering. However, while it is true that evils such as war, rape, murder, and exploitation can be blamed on humans, they can hardly be blamed for the millions who die each year in earthquakes, tornados, floods, epidemics, and accidents, all of which are natural events. In fact, if the Bible is correct, the germs that cause hideous diseases like tuberculosis, polio, cholera, leprosy, etc. and all the misery, deformity, and suffering to which they give rise, were created by God before he created man (Gen. 1:11—12). So it is not correct to say that evil and suffering are caused by humanity.

Another way Christians will try to explain away evil is to say that it is God's punishment for those who do not follow his commandments. However, this implies that terrible things only happen to bad people, which is certainly not true. We often hear of painful sickness or disasters befalling good people, including good Christians, and in like manner, we often hear of really bad people who seem to have nothing but good fortune and success. Therefore, it cannot be said that suffering and evil are God's way of punishing sinners.

Next, Christians will say that God allows evil to exist in the world because he wants to give us the freedom to choose good over evil and, thereby, be worthy of salvation. Evil, they say, exists to test us. At first, this may seem like a good explanation. If a man sees someone being beaten up by a bully, he has a choice between turning away (doing wrong) or deciding to help the victim (doing right). If he decides to help, then he has been tested and found to be good. However, as we have seen before, an all-knowing God must already know what choices a person will make, so what is the point of testing us? Also, even if suffering and evil exist to test us, could an all-loving God not think of a less cruel and painful way to do this? Further, it seems rather unloving and unfair to allow pain to be inflicted on one person just so that another can have the opportunity to choose between good and evil.

Some Christians will try to free God from responsibility for evil by saying that it was not created by him but by the Devil. But again, if God is so loving, why does he not simply prevent the Devil from causing suffering and doing evil? And in any case, who created the Devil in the first place? Surely, it was God.

By this stage, Christians may start to get a bit desperate and shift the argument from logic to pragmatism. They will say that, even though there is suffering in the world, we can use it as an opportunity to develop courage and patience. However, this still does not explain why an all-

loving God allows babies to die of cancer or be born with birth defects, innocent bystanders to be killed in accidents, or leprosy victims to suffer deformity, misery, and pain. In fact, the existence of so much pointless and unnecessary pain and suffering in the world is strong evidence that there is no all-loving, all-powerful God.

### **Why Create?**

Christians claim that God is perfect. To be perfect means to be complete in every way. Now, if God really did create the universe, this would prove that he is not perfect. Let us examine why this is so. Before God created the universe, there was nothing — no sun, no earth, no people, no good or evil, no pain and suffering —, nothing but God, who was, according to Christians, perfect. So if God was perfect and nothing but perfection existed, what motivated him to create the universe and thus bring imperfection into being? Was it because he was bored and wanted to do something? Was it because he was lonely and wanted someone to pray to him?

Christians will say that God created everything because of his love of man, but this is impossible. God could not love humans before he created them any more than a woman could love her children before she had conceived them. Further, God's need to create indicates that he was dissatisfied in some way and, therefore, not perfect. Christians might then say that God created spontaneously and without need or desire. However, this would mean that the whole universe came into being without purpose or forethought and, therefore, God could not have been a loving creator.

### **The Problem of the Hidden God**

Christians claim that God wants us to believe in him so that we can be saved, but if this is so, why does he not simply appear and perform a miracle so that everyone will see and believe? Christians will say that God wants us to believe in him out of faith, not because we see him with our own eyes. However, according to the Bible, in the past, God performed the most awesome miracles and often intervened dramatically in human affairs so that people would know his presence. If he did so in the past, why does he not do so now?

Christians will say that God does perform miracles today (healing the sick, solving personal problems, etc.), but being evil and stubborn, most people still refuse to believe. However, these so-called “miracles” are typically individual and minor and, consequently, leave much room for doubt. If God performed a really impressive miracle which could have no other possible explanation, then most people would certainly believe.

The Bible tells us that, when the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years, God fed them by making food regularly fall from the sky (Ex. 16:4). During the 1980s, several million Ethiopian Christians died slowly and painfully from starvation due to a prolonged drought. At that time, God had the opportunity to prove his existence, his power, and his love by making food fall from the sky as the Bible claims he did in the past. However, this did not happen. Buddhists would say that God did not manifest his presence at that time because he does not exist.

### **God and the 2004 Tsunami**

Probably the best argument against the idea of an all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God is provided not by logic or philosophy, reason or common sense, but by Mother Nature. On the 26th of December 2004, an earthquake off Sumatra caused huge waves to crash on the shores in Indonesia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Over 230,000 people were killed, and over two million lost their homes and means of livelihood. The next time Christians try to evangelize you, ask them why a loving God allowed such a terrible thing to happen. The next time Christians mention to you that God speaks to them, ask them why God did not tell them or someone else that there was going to be a tsunami. Point out that the tsunami struck on a Sunday, when many Christians in the affected areas were in church. Ask them why God did not warn even one of them of the terrible tragedy that was about to strike. The Bible says of Jesus, “Even the wind and waves obey him” (Matt. 8:27), so ask your Christian friends why he did not stop the tsunami. The next time you hear a Christian claim that God healed the sick ask them why God did not save the 230,000 people from being drowned in the tsunami. If you ask Christians these simple questions, they will equivocate, hedge, give long, convoluted excuses, or try to change the subject, but they will not be able to give you a straightforward, convincing answer. And why? Because God does not exist. ■

# 3

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## God or The Buddha

While Christians look to God as their lord and creator, Buddhists look to the Buddha as their inspiration and ideal. Although Christians have never seen God, they claim to know him by communicating with him through prayer and through feeling his presence. They also claim they can know God's will by reading his words in the Bible. Since Buddhists neither pray to nor acknowledge God, the only way they can get an idea of what he is like is by reading the Bible. However, when Buddhists look at what the Bible says about God, they are often quite shocked. They find that how God is portrayed there is profoundly different from how he is described by Christians. While Buddhists reject the Christian concept of God because it seems illogical and unsubstantiated, they also reject it because it seems so much lower than their own ideal, the Buddha. We will now examine what the Bible says about God and compare it to what the Buddhist sacred scriptures (the *Tipiṭaka*) say about the Buddha.

### Physical Appearance

What does God look like? The Bible says that he created man in his own image (Gen. 1:26), so from this, we can assume he looks something like a human being. The Bible tells us that God has hands (Ex. 15:12), arms (Deut. 11:12), fingers (Ps. 8:3), and a face (Deut. 13:17). Apparently, he does not like people to see his face, but he does not mind if they see his backside:

*And I will take away my hands and you will see my back parts but my face you shall not see. (Ex. 33:23.)*

However, although God seems to have some human characteristics, he does, at the same time, look somewhat like the demons and fierce guardians that one often sees in Indian and Chinese temples. For example, he has flames coming out of his body:

*A fire issues from his presence and burns his enemies on every side. (Ps. 97:3.)*

*Our God comes and shall not keep silent, before him a fire burns and around him fierce storms rage. (Ps. 50:3.)*

*Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. (Num. 11:1.)*

When God is angry, which seems to be quite often, smoke and fire come out of his mouth and nose:

*The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook, they trembled because he was angry. Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it. (Ps. 18:7—8.)*

When the prophet Ezekiel saw God and his attendant angels, he described them as looking like this:

*On the fifth of the month — it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin — the word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the Lord was upon him. I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left side the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning. As I looked at the living creatures, I saw a wheel on the ground beside each creature with its four faces. This was the appearance and structure of the wheels: They sparkled like chrysolite, and all four looked alike. Each appeared to be made like a wheel intersecting a wheel. (Ex. 1:4—21.)*

Christians often claim that the many-armed and fierce-faced gods in Hindu and Taoist temples are devils rather than gods. But the Bible describes God as having a very similar appearance. For example, he carries weapons:

*In that day the Lord will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword. (Is. 27:1.)*

*The sun and moon stood still in the heavens at the glint of your flying arrows, at the lightning of your flashing spear. In wrath you strode through the earth and your angel threshed the nations. (Haba. 3:11—12.)*

*The Lord thundered from Heaven, the voice of the Most High resounded. He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies. (Ps. 18:13—14.)*

*But God will shoot them with arrows, suddenly they will be struck down. (Ps. 64:7.)*

*Then the Lord will appear over them, his arrows will flash like lightning. The sovereign Lord will sound the trumpet. (Zech. 18:13—14.)*

Another interesting way in which God's appearance resembles non-Christian idols is in how he travels. The Bible tells us that he gets from one place to another either by sitting on a cloud (Is. 19:1) or by riding on the back of an angel (Ps. 18:10). It is obvious from these passages that God has a savage and frightening appearance — a conclusion verified again by the Bible, where people are described as being utterly terrified by his appearance:

*Serve the Lord with fear and trembling, kiss his feet or else he will get angry and you will perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. (Ps. 2:11.)*

*Therefore I am terrified at his presence. When I think of him I am in dread of him, God has made my heart faint. The Almighty has terrified me. (Job 23:15.)*

Jesus says that God is a truly frightening deity (for example: Lk. 12:4—5). The Bible also very correctly says that, where there is fear, there cannot be love (1 Jn. 4:18), and so if God creates fear in people, it is difficult to know how they can genuinely be loved at the same time.

What did the Buddha look like? Being human, the Buddha had a body like an ordinary person. However, the scriptures (the *Tiṭiṭaka*) frequently speak of his great personal beauty:

*He is handsome, good-looking, pleasant to see, of most beautiful complexion, his form and his countenance is like Brahma's, his appearance is beautiful. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 4.)*

*He is handsome, inspiring faith, with calm senses and mind tranquil, composed, and controlled, like a perfectly tamed elephant. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Sutta no. 36.)*

Whenever people saw the Buddha, his calm appearance filled them with peace, and his gentle smile reassured them. As we have seen, the Christian God is loud and frightening like thunder (Ps. 68:33), while the Buddha's voice was gentle and soothing:

*When in a monastery, he is teaching the Dhamma, he does not exalt or disparage the assembly. On the contrary, he delights, uplifts, inspires, and gladdens them with talk on Dhamma. The sound of the good Gotama's voice has eight characteristics: it is distinct and intelligible, sweet and audible, fluent and clear, deep and resonant. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 19.)*

The Christian God carries weapons because he has to kill his enemies and because he controls and terrifies people with violence and threats. The Buddha, by contrast, showed enmity toward no one and was able to persuade people by reasoning with them. Addressing the Buddha, King Pasenadi once said:

*I am a king, able to execute those deserving execution, fine those deserving to be fined, or exile those deserving exile. But when I am sitting on a court case, people sometimes interrupt even me. I cannot even get a chance to say: "Do not interrupt me! Wait until I have finished speaking". But when the Lord is teaching Dhamma, there is not even the sound of coughing coming from the assembly. Once, as I sat listening to the Lord teach Dhamma, a certain disciple coughed, and one of his fellows tapped him on the knee and said, "Silence, Sir, make no noise. Our Lord is teaching Dhamma", and I thought to myself, indeed, it is wonderful, marvelous how well trained these disciples are without stick or sword. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 89.)*

We can just imagine how the Christian God would react if one were foolish enough to interrupt him while he was speaking. It is clear from what has been said above that the Buddha's physical appearance reflected his deep inner calm and compassion. People were always inspired by the aura of serenity that surrounded him.

## **Character**

We have seen that Buddhists do not believe in God because to them the idea is illogical and contrary to the facts. But Buddhists also reject the Christian God because, if the Bible is correct, he appears to be so imperfect, flawed, defective. All of the negative emotions which most cultured people consider unacceptable seem to be found in God. Let us examine how the Bible describes God's character. The emotion which is associated with God more than any other is jealousy. He even admits that he is jealous:

*For the Lord is a devouring fire, a jealous God. (Deut. 4:24.)*

Nothing makes God more jealous than when people worship other gods, and he tells them that they must even kill their own children when they do this:

*If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son, daughter, the wife of your bosom or the friend of your own soul, entices you secretly, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods" which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the people that are around you whether near or far, from one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him, but you shall kill him. Your hand shall be the first against him to kill him and after that the others can strike him. (Deut. 13:6.)*

The Bible tells us that God frequently loses his temper:

*See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. (Is. 13:9.)*

*The Lord will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire. (Is. 30:30.)*



*His anger will burn against you and he will destroy you from the face of the land. (Deut. 6:15.)*

God tells us to love, but he is described as hating and being filled with abhorrence:

*You hate all those who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors. (Ps. 5:5—6.)*

God is described as hating many other things as well as people (see Deut. 16:22; Mala. 2:16; Lev. 26:30). God has a particularly intense hatred for other religions, which probably explains why Christianity has always been such an intolerant religion. He is often described as feeling special hatred for those who will not worship him:

*Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. (Is. 1:14.)*

The Buddha, on the other hand, had compassion for those who were cruel, he forgave those who did wrong, and he had respect for those who followed other religions.

We would expect God, being capable of jealousy and hate, to be vengeful, and so, not surprisingly, the Bible often mentions God's vengeful nature:

*Behold, your God will come with vengeance. (Is. 35:4.)*

*The Lord is avenging and wrathful, the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and holds wrath for his enemies. (Nahum. 1:2.)*

*For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay", and again, "The Lord will judge his people". It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb. 10:30—31; see also Rom. 2:5—6, 12:19.)*

As Richard Dawkins says in his book *The GOD Delusion*:

*The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.*

Buddhists are genuinely shocked when they read such things. What sort of savage deity is this! What is the point of worshipping a God who is so full of the very mental defilements which we are ourselves striving to overcome?

During the forty years after His enlightenment, the Buddha encouraged people to give up anger, jealousy, and intolerance, and never once in all that time did He fail to act in perfect harmony with what He taught to others:

*The Blessed One acts as He speaks and speaks as He acts. We find no teacher other than the Blessed One, who is so consistent as this whether we survey the past or the present. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 19.)*

In the whole of the *Tipiṭaka*, there is not a single example of the Buddha expressing anger, hatred, jealousy, intolerance, etc., because, being enlightened, He has transcended all such negative emotions.

### **Attitude about War**

The Bible tells us that there is a time for hate and a time for war (Ex. 3:8), and it is widely recognized today that those two great evils feed upon each other. As we have seen, God is quite capable of hatred and so, not surprisingly, that he is often involved in war:

*The Lord is a man of war.* (Ex. 15:3.)

*The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory.* (Zeph. 3:17.)

*The Lord goes forth like a mighty man, like a man of war he stirs up his fury, he cries out, he shouts aloud, he shows himself mighty against the enemy.* (Is. 42:13.)

*When I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand grasps it in judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me. I will make my arrows drunk with blood while my sword devours flesh: the blood of the slain and the captives, the heads of the enemy leaders.* (Deut. 32:41—42.)

In the last book of the New Testament (*The Revelation to John*), the vision of Jesus is a purely military one:

*His eyes are like blazing fire and on his head are many crowns... He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God. The armies of Heaven were following him... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule with an iron scepter. He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.* (Rev. 19:11—16.)

The Bible contains dozens of examples of God helping his followers capture cities, slaughter civilian populations, and defeat armies (for example: Num. 21:1—3; Num. 31:1—12; Deut. 2:32—34; Deut. 3:3—7; Josh. 11:6—11; etc.). Concerning prisoners of war, God says:

*And you shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God gives over to you, your eye shall not pity them.* (Deut. 7:16.)

*When the Lord your God gives them over to you and you defeat them you must utterly destroy them and show no mercy to them.* (Deut. 7:2.)

If military commanders do such things today, they are considered war criminals. Even Christians are often shocked when they read passages like these in the Bible. Buddhists simply feel that such passages justify their rejection of God and their reverence for the Buddha.

What is the Buddha's attitude to war? There are, of course, no examples of Him ever praising war or going to war Himself. On the contrary, He urged all to live in peace and harmony and is described as being like this Himself:

*He is a reconciler of those who are in conflict and an encourager of those who are already united; rejoicing in peace, loving peace, delighting in peace, He is one who speaks in praise of peace. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 1.)*

*Abandoning killing, the Monk Gotama lives refraining from killing. He is without stick or sword, and He lives with care, kindness, and compassion for others. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 1.)*

But the Buddha was not content with merely speaking in favor of peace or being peaceful Himself. He actively promoted peace by trying to stop war. When His relatives were about to go to war with each other over the waters of the Rohiṇī River, the Buddha did not take sides, urge them on, give them advice on tactics, or tell them to show no mercy to their adversaries as the God of the Old Testament did. Instead, He courageously stood between the two factions and brought them to their senses by asking, "What is more valuable, blood or water?" The soldiers replied, "Blood is more valuable, Sir". Then, the Buddha said, "Then, is it not unbecoming to spill blood just for the sake of water?" Thereupon, both sides dropped their weapons, and peace was restored (*Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, Book 15.1). The Buddha had put aside hatred and filled His mind with love and compassion, so approving of war was impossible for Him.

### **Idea of Justice**

Justice is the quality of being fair, and one who is just acts fairly and in accordance with what is right. However, ideas about what is fair and right differ from time to time and from person to person. Christians claim that God is just. So by examining his actions, we will be able to know his concept of justice. God tells us that anybody who disobeys him will be punished "seven times over" (Lev. 26:18), that is, one sin will be punished seven times. God apparently considers this to be fair and just. He also tells us that he will punish the innocent children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren of those who sin:

*I the Lord am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. (Deut. 5:9.)*

This is known as "collective punishment" — punishing a whole family or group for a crime committed by one of its members. Collective punishment is universally condemned today, but God seems to consider it quite fair and just.

God tells us that even minor offenses should be punished by death. For example, he says that those who work on the Sabbath should be stoned to death. Once a man was found collecting firewood on the Sabbath, and God said to Moses and the people who caught the man:

*“The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.” So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death as the Lord commanded Moses. (Num. 15:32—36.)*

To demand capital punishment for such a minor offense seems to be a monstrous injustice. Not only that, stoning to death is one of the most cruel and barbaric forms of capital punishment. God’s idea of justice does not seem to embrace the idea that the punishment should fit the crime. We are told that all who do not love God will suffer eternal punishment in Hell. There are many kind, honest, and good people who do not believe in God, and they will all go to Hell. Is this fair and just? God apparently thinks so.

Was the Buddha just? He had attained the freedom of enlightenment and taught others how they too could attain this same freedom. Unlike God, the Buddha was not primarily a lawgiver, a judge, or some who metes out punishment. Instead, the Buddha was a teacher. In all His dealings with people, He was fair, mild, and merciful, and He encouraged His followers to act in a like manner. If someone did wrong, He said that one should not rush to judge or punish them:

*When you are living together in harmony, a fellow Monk might commit an offense, a transgression. But you should not rush to condemn him; the issue must be carefully examined first. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 103.)*

In addition, when a person is being examined, one should remain uninfluenced by bias or partiality and should look at both sides of the case:

*Not by passing hasty judgments does one become just — a wise person is one who investigates both sides. One who does not judge others arbitrarily but passes judgment impartially and in accordance with the facts, such a person is a guardian of the law and is rightly called “just”. (Dhammapada, verses 256—257.)*

As for punishment, the Buddha would have considered stoning to death or any other form of capital punishment to be utterly unacceptable. He Himself was always ready to forgive. Once a man named Nigrodha boasted that he could stump the Buddha with a single question but later realized his mistake, confessed it to the Buddha, and asked for His forgiveness. Full of understanding and compassion, the Buddha said:

*Indeed, Nigrodha, transgression overcame you when, through ignorance, blindness, and evil, you spoke to me like that. But since you acknowledge your transgression and make amends as is right, I accept your confession. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 25.)*

The Buddha forgave all, whether they accepted His teachings or not, and even if Nigrodha had refused to apologize, the Buddha would not have threatened to punish him. To the Buddha, the proper response to faults was not the threat to punish but education and forgiveness. He said:

*By three things the wise can be known. What three? They see their faults as they are. When they see them, they correct them, and when another confesses a fault, the wise forgive them, as they should. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Threes, Sutta no. 10.)*

### Attitude to Disease

Disease, sickness, and plagues have been the scourge of humanity for centuries, causing untold suffering and misery. The Bible shows that God has always considered disease to be a useful way of expressing his anger and exercising his vengeance. When Pharaoh refused to release the Jews from bondage, God caused festering boils to break out on “all Egyptians” (Ex. 9:8—12). He used this affliction to punish men, women, children, and babies for the sin of one man. Later, he caused every first-born male Egyptian child to die. He said:

*Every first-born son in Egypt will die, from the first-born son of Pharaoh who sits on the throne, to the first-born son of the slave girl who sits at her hand-mill. There will be a loud wailing throughout Egypt — worse than there has ever been or ever will be. (Ex. 11:5—6.)*

This is another shameful example of God’s idea of justice and compassion. Countless thousands of men, boys, and innocent babies were killed by God because Pharaoh would not obey him. In many places in the Bible, God threatens to inflict hideous diseases on those who do not follow his commandments:

*The Lord will plague with diseases until he has destroyed you... the Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation... (Deut. 28:21—22.)*

*The Lord will inflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores, and with itch, from which you cannot be cured. (Deut. 28:27.)*

*The Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters and severe and lingering illness. He will bring upon you all the disasters of Egypt that you dreaded and they will cling to you. The Lord will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster. (Deut. 28:59—61.)*

Sometimes, God even inflicts hideous diseases on people just to test their faith. To test Job, he allowed all Job’s children to be killed (Job 1:18—19) and Job himself to be struck with a terrible disease (Job 2:6—8). So unbearable was Job’s grief and suffering that he began to wish that he had never been born (Job 3:3—26). God even created some people blind and allowed them to spend their lives begging and groping in darkness just so that Jesus could miraculously heal them and, thereby, demonstrate God’s power (Jn. 9:1—4). Obviously, God also sees illness, sickness, and disease as a useful way of demonstrating the extent of his power.

Now, let us have a look at the Buddha’s attitude toward sickness. The Buddha saw sickness and disease as a part of the general suffering from which He came to free mankind. Thus, He was called the “compassionate physician”. There are no examples of the Buddha ever having caused people to become diseased in order to punish them or because He was angry at

them. He rightly understood that, for as long as we have a body, we will be susceptible to disease, and He encouraged all to attain *nirvāṇa* and be forever free from suffering. But while He tried to cut the problem off at the root, He also took practical steps to comfort the sick and restore them to health. Rather than inflict diseases on people as God did, the Buddha gave advice on how to help and comfort the sick:

*With five qualities, one is worthy to nurse the sick. What five? One can prepare the correct medicine; one knows what is good for the patient and offers it, and what is not good one does not offer; one nurses the sick out of love, not out of desire for gain; one is unmoved by excrement, urine, vomit, and spittle; and from time to time, one can instruct, inspire, gladden, and satisfy the sick with talk on Dhamma. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Fives, Sutta no. 124.)*

The Buddha not only taught this but acted in conformity to His own teaching. Once, when He found a sick Monk neglected and lying in his own excrement, He bathed him, comforted him, and called the other Monks together and said to them, “If you would nurse Me, nurse those who are sick” (*Vinaya*, Mahāvagga, 8). When God was angry, he would inflict diseases on people and then watch them suffer. When the Buddha saw people with diseases, out of compassion, He did all He could to restore them to health.

## Creating Evil

According to the Bible, God created not only all that is good, he also created all that is evil:

*I am the Lord and there is no other. I form the light and I create the darkness, I make the good and I make the evil. (Is. 45:7—8.)*

*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both disasters and good things come? (Lam. 3:38.)*

When we think of nature and remember that God is supposed to have created everything, we understand the meaning of these words. Leprosy germs cause untold misery, and they were created by God. Tuberculosis germs kill and deform millions of humans each year, and they too were created by God. He created the plague bacteria, the fleas, and the rats that together cause bubonic plague and which have killed perhaps as many as a hundred million people throughout the centuries. No doubt, all this is what God means when he says that he created darkness and evil. But God tells us that he also created other forms of evil as well. He says:

*When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? (Amos 3:4.)*

This undoubtedly refers to the earthquakes, fires, social strife, wars, and other forms of evil which periodically afflict towns and cities. According to the Bible, even evil spirits come from God. In 1 Samuel 17:14—16, we are told that an evil spirit from God tormented Saul. The

next time Christians try to evangelize you, ask them to turn to these Bible verses and to explain them to you.

Did the Buddha create evil? Inasmuch as He was not a Creator God, He cannot be held responsible for “darkness and evil”. The only thing the Buddha can be said to have “created” was the *Dhamma*, which He discovered and then proclaimed to the world. And this *Dhamma* has brought only light, good, and gentleness everywhere it has spread.

## Sacrifices

In Old Testament times, when people broke God’s commandments, he would get angry, and the only way the sinner could make atonement and soothe God’s anger was to sacrifice an animal. God himself gave exact instructions on how this was to be done:

*If the offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, he is to offer a dove or a young pigeon. The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off its head and burn it on the altar. He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the side of the altar. (Lev. 1:14—17.)*

God tells us that, when the meat, fat, skin, bone, and hair of the sacrificial victims are thrown in the fire and burned, he likes the smell of it (Lev. 1:9, 1:17).

In later times, humanity’s sins became so bad that the sacrifice of mere animals could no longer appease God’s anger. He required a greater, a more valuable victim — his own son Jesus. Once again, it was the blood of a victim which most atoned for sin and which was able to reconcile the sinners with God. Thus, modern Christians often say that their “sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus”.

What did the Buddha think of animal or human sacrifices? During His time, Indian deities were offered animal sacrifices just as the Christian God was, and so the Buddha was quite aware of this crude practice. However, He considered all types of blood sacrifices to be vulgar, cruel, and useless:

*The sacrifice of horse or man, the Peg-Thrown Rite, the Sacrificial Drink, the Victory Rite, the Withdrawn Rite, all these rites are not worth a sixteenth part of having a heart filled with love, any more than the radiance of the moon outshines the stars. (Āṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Eights, Sutta no. 1.)*

Christians believe that the sacrificial blood of Jesus will wash away their sins just as Indians at the time of the Buddha believed that their sins could be washed away by bathing in holy rivers. The Buddha criticized the Indian idea just as He would have criticized the Christian idea had He known about it. To believe that blood, water, or any other external thing or things can purify the heart did not make sense to the Buddha:

*In the Bāhukā River, at Adhikakkā, at Gayā, in the Sundarikā, the Sarassatī, the Payāga, or the Bahumatī, the fool can wash constantly but not cleanse his evil deeds. What can*

*the Sundarikā, the Payāga, or the Bahumatī River do? They cannot cleanse the angry, guilty man intent on evil deeds. For the pure in heart, every day is lucky; for the pure in heart, every day is holy. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 7.)*

This being the case, bathing in holy rivers or washing away one's sins by the sacrificial blood of Jesus, even symbolically, are worthless rituals and are a poor substitute for purifying oneself by acting with integrity, kindness, and generosity. The only sacrifice the Buddha asked us to make was to give up our selfishness and replace it with love, wisdom, and kindness.

## Love

We are told that God is love, and the Bible sometimes mentions love as one of God's attributes. However, there are different types of love. A person can love his or her children but hate the neighbor's children. People may have a strong love for their own country but a burning hatred for another country. Although we may love someone deeply, we may, due to changed circumstances, grow indifferent or even hateful towards them. This is the lower, less developed type of love which ordinary people feel. But, there is a higher, more universal type of love than this. This higher type of love is called *mettā* in Buddhism and *agape* in Christianity and is well described in the Buddhist scriptures and also in the Bible. In 1 Corinthians, we read:

*Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. (1 Cor. 13:4—5.)*

Does God have this higher type of love? We are told that “love is patient”. Patience is defined as the ability to wait calmly for a long time, to control oneself when angered, especially at foolishness or slowness. We have already seen that God gets angry every day (Ps. 7:11) and that he gets angry very quickly (Ps. 2:11). Obviously, he has very little patience.

We are told that “love is kind”. Is God kind? Turn to Deuteronomy 28:15—68 and read God describing in his own words just how cruel he can be. This shocking passage proves beyond all doubt that God is capable of terrible cruelty. Obviously, he is not always very kind.

In several places in the Bible, God says that those who disobey him will be forced to eat the flesh of their own children — such cold-hearted punishment is hardly what one would expect from a loving, caring God:

*You will eat your own children, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the Lord your God gave you, on account of the siege and distress with which your enemy will oppress you. (Deut. 28:53.)*

*You will eat the flesh of your sons and daughters. (Lev. 26:29.)*

*Then he asked her, “What is the matter?” She answered, “This woman said to me, ‘Give me your son so that we may eat him today, and tomorrow we will eat my son’.” (2 Kings 6:28.)*



*I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh because their enemies will press the siege so hard against them to destroy them.* (Jer. 19:9.)

We are told that “[love] does not envy”. Envy is, of course, very similar to jealousy, and God often describes himself as fiercely jealous. He says:

*For the Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.* (Deut. 4:24.)

We are told that “[love] does not boast” and “is not proud”. Is God like this? Certainly, the Bible does not give us the impression that he is a modest or retiring deity. He spends a lot of time telling Job how great he is (Job 43:44) and ends by boasting of himself that:

*He looks down on all that are haughty, he is king over all that are proud.* (Job 41:34.)

Next, we are told that “[love] is not easily angered”. We have already seen that God is easily angered:

*Serve the Lord with fear and trembling, kiss his feet or else he will get angry and you will perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.* (Ps. 2:11.)

Finally, we are told that “[love] keeps no record of wrongs” that are done, that is, it soon forgives and forgets. Does God keep a record of wrongs? Indeed, he does — he tells us that he will punish the children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren of those who sin (Deut. 5:9). In order to do this, he must keep a record of the wrongs that have been committed and long remember them. Jesus tells us that God will never forgive those who insult the Holy Ghost (Lk. 12:10). We are told that God casts sinners and non-believers into eternal Hell. In other words, he refuses to forgive them ever. In short, he keeps a record for all eternity of the wrongs that people have done, and he mercilessly punishes them for those wrongs forever. Quite clearly, God does not have the highest kind of love.

What about the Buddha? Did He have the highest kind of love? The first characteristic of the highest kind of love is patience, and there is not one instance recorded in the *Tipiṭika* of the Buddha being impatient. Even when He was abused, He remained calm and unruffled. His every action displays a calm, strong patience. When Asurindaka Bhāradvāja cursed and abused the Buddha, He calmly replied:

*He who abuses his abuser is the worse of the two. To refrain from retaliation is to win a battle hard to win. If one knows that the other person is angry but refrains from anger oneself, one does what is best for oneself and the other person also.* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Chapter Seven, Sutta no. 3.)

Just as He was always patient, the Buddha was also free from anger. Even when His cousin Devadatta tried to murder Him, He displayed only pity and tolerance.

We are also told that love is kind. Was the Buddha kind? Again, there is not the slightest hint of the Buddha being anything other than kind and compassionate — not only to those who

accepted His teachings but also to the followers of other faiths, not only to the good but also to the evil, not only to humans but also to animals. He said:

*One should do no unkind thing that the wise men might condemn, and one should think, “May all beings be secure and happy. Whatever beings there are, moving or still, tall, middle-sized, or short, great or small, seen or unseen, whether living far or near, existing or not yet come into existence, may they all be happy”. One should not harm another or despise anyone for any reason. Do not wish pain on another out of either anger or jealousy. Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so, one should develop unbounded love towards all beings in the world. (Sutta Nipāta, 145—149.)*

Not only did the Buddha teach this, but He also practiced everything He taught.

God tells us that he is jealous, and by this he means that he is jealous of other gods and other religions. He wants everyone to worship and revere him alone. So jealous is he that he says his followers should kill even their own children if they worship other gods (Deut. 13:6.) and that God hates followers of other religions:

*I hate those who cling to worthless idols. (Ps. 31:6.)*

*I gain understanding from your precepts, therefore I hate every wrong path. (Ps. 119: 104.)*

Was the Buddha jealous of other faiths? Indeed, He was not. A rich man named Upāli was a follower of Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta, the leader of the Jain religion. The Buddha explained the *Dhamma* to him, after which he decided to become a Buddhist. The Buddha did not gloat, nor was he anxious to “win” Upāli as a convert. Rather, He advised Upāli to think carefully before making such an important decision:

*Make a careful investigation first, Upāli. Careful investigation is good for well-known people like yourself. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 56.)*

The Buddha then encouraged Upāli to keep offering donations to the Jains. He said this because He was able to appreciate the good in other religions and because He was free from envy and jealousy.

Once, the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta approached the Buddha and quizzed Him about charity:

*Vacchagotta said to the Blessed One, “I have heard it said that you say that charity should only be given to you, not to other teachers, to your disciples, not to the disciples of other religions”. Then, the Blessed One said, “Those who say this are not reporting my words, they misrepresent me and tell lies. Truly, whoever discourages anyone from giving charity hinders in three ways. He hinders the giver from doing good, he hinders the receiver from being helped, and he hinders himself through his meanness”. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Threes, Sutta no. 57.)*

Even today, many Christians will refuse to have anything to do with non-Christians and refuse to help non-Christian charities.

The Buddha was not boastful or proud, He was not rude or self-seeking, He was not easily angered, and He did not keep a record of wrongs that were done to Him. From the day of His enlightenment, His every thought, word, and deed was an expression of love and compassion. As one of His contemporaries said:

*Thus have I heard, “To abide in love is sublime indeed”, and the Blessed One is proof of this because we can see that He abides in love. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 55.)*

Some of the Bible passages quoted in this chapter are rather shocking; even some Christians find them disquieting. When non-Christians point out such passages to them, Christians will say that they come mainly from the Old Testament and are not how God really is but how people at the time understood him to be. How amusing it is to discuss the Bible with Christians! At one moment, they claim that the Old Testament is God’s eternal word, and, at another, that it is not. When Christians quote the Old Testament to prove a point of doctrine, they claim that it is authoritative scripture. But when non-Christians quote some of the Bible’s many shocking passages to prove an opposing point of view, Christians claim that it is merely a reflection of people’s limited understanding of God. How duplicitous! ■



# 4

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## Fact or Fiction in the Life of Jesus

The single thing which makes Christianity what it is, the foundation on which it rests, is Jesus Christ, or rather, claims about Jesus Christ. Christians are always making the most exaggerated claims about this man; that he was the only person in history to claim to be God, that only faith in Jesus can give a person peace and happiness, that thousands saw him rise from the dead, so it must be true, and so on, and so forth. All these claims sound very impressive, and certainly millions of people believe them. But are they true? Let us have a look.

### Did Jesus Exist?

All Christians and even many non-Christians assume that Jesus was a real person. However, other than the New Testament itself, there is not a shred of evidence to show that he ever lived. According to the Gospels, Jesus was a well-known figure in Judea (Mk. 6:13; Lk. 7:17). Given this claim, it is strange that he is not mentioned in any contemporary Hebrew, Latin, Aramaic, or Greek literature or in any inscriptions from that time. To be sure, there is one alleged reference to the biblical Jesus Christ in book 18, chapter 3, 3, of the *Antiquities of the Jews*, written between 93—94 CE by the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37—100 CE), but all scholars now consider this to be a later insertion/alteration. The very fact that later Christians committed this forgery suggests that they did so precisely because there is so little evidence that Jesus ever lived. This is not to say that he did not exist, but only that there is no independent evidence that he did.

### Prophecies about and by Jesus

Every time there is a change in the turbulent politics of the Middle East, Christians will open their Bibles and loudly proclaim that the latest crisis was foretold or prophesied centuries ago. These so-called “prophecies” are bandied about for a while and then quietly dropped when they do not come to completion in the way the Christians claimed they would. When one asks to have an actual look at these “amazing prophecies”, one can see that they are usually so vague and general that they could be interpreted to correspond to virtually any event. For example, the Bible says that, before Jesus returns, “there will be wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6), and, since there are numerous conflicts going on now, this is a sign that Jesus is about to come again. The problem with this prophecy is that it could refer to any period in world history because there are always a few wars occurring somewhere. When the prophecies are more explicit and clear,

they are invariably wrong. For example, the Holy Ghost predicted to Agabus that there would soon be worldwide famine (Acts 11:28). But there is no record whatsoever that such a thing happened around that time. Christians also claim that events in the life of Jesus were prophesied in the Bible long before he was born, and the fact that these prophecies came true proves that he really was the Messiah. Let us now look at some of these supposed “prophecies” and see if they are as accurate as Christians claim. In the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament, it says:

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. (Is. 9:6—7.)*

This is supposed to be a prophecy foretelling the birth of Jesus. But does it? Other than being born, no event mentioned here ever happened to Jesus. The government was not upon his shoulders, he was never called, nor did he call himself by the titles mentioned here, and there has been no more peace since he was born than there was before. This is a fairly good example of the “amazing prophecies” of Christianity. Before Jesus was born, an angel is supposed to have prophesied that:

*The Lord God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was, and he will be the king of the descendants of Jacob forever. (Lk. 1:32—33.)*

But if what the Bible says is true, David could not possibly have been Jesus’s ancestor because God, not Joseph, is alleged to have been Jesus’s real father. Further, David was a king in a political sense, while Jesus never became a king in this way or in any other way similar to David. And finally, the descendants of Jacob (that is, the Jews) never accepted Jesus as their king — politically, spiritually, or in any other way — and have refused to accept him to this day. So as before, this prophecy is wrong on every point. Again, in the book of Isaiah, it says:

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. (Is. 53:7.)*

This is supposed to prophesize that, when Jesus was attacked by his opponents, he would not retaliate. But in the Gospels, Jesus is portrayed as robustly defending himself against criticism and loudly condemning his enemies. He cursed and criticized the Pharisees when they opposed him, and according to the Gospel of John (18:33—37), he was anything but silent at his trial.

When the Romans crucified people, they would nail them to a cross, let them hang there for some time, and then finally, break their legs, thereby increasing the poor victim’s pain and killing them. According to the Bible, when the Romans came to break Jesus’s legs, he was already dead, and so they did not bother (Jn. 19:31—34). This, so Christians claim, was prophesied centuries before the birth of Jesus in Psalm 34:20, where it says that God will not let even one bone of the Messiah’s body to be broken. Unfortunately, Christians have overlooked one very important fact. Even though the bones in Jesus’s legs may not have been broken, the

bones in his hands and feet definitely were. When the nails were driven into his hands and feet, they must have broken or crushed several of the metacarpals.

Christians claim that Jesus died and, on the third day, rose from the dead, and, of course, they claim that this was prophesied before it happened. The supposed prophecy says:

*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* (Matt. 12:40.)

But like the others, this prophecy is wrong. Jesus died on Friday ("Good Friday") and supposedly rose from the dead early on Sunday morning ("Easter Sunday"). Even a child can see that this is not three days and three nights as the prophecy says, but one day and two nights. Another problem is that, just before Jesus died, he turned to the two criminals with him and said, "I assure you, today you will be in Paradise with me" (Lk. 23:43). Yet, according to the prophecy, Jesus would be in the tomb for three days and nights before ascending into Heaven, so how could he assure the two criminals that they would be in Heaven with him on the day he died? But, it is not just prophecies about Jesus that are wrong — the prophecies he himself made were also wrong. Christians are constantly claiming that the end of the world is coming soon. Where do they get this bizarre idea from? They get it from Jesus. He believed and explicitly taught that the world would end within his own lifetime or very soon afterwards:

*I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.* (Lk. 21:25—33.)

By "this generation", he was obviously referring to the people he was addressing. On another occasion, he again told the people who stood listening to him that some of them would still be alive when the end of the world came:

*I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.* (Matt. 16:28.)

On every one of these points, Jesus's prophecies proved to be wrong. The people who lived at his time have been dead for two thousand years, and the world has not ended nor has Jesus returned. Jesus's disciples finished going through all the cities in Judea within a few years after his death, and he still has not returned.

These and other examples prove that most of the supposed prophecies about Jesus are false. But even when a prophecy seems to be true does not necessarily mean anything. It can be demonstrated that whoever wrote the Gospels deliberately invented events in the life of Jesus to make them fit into what they thought were prophecies about him. We will examine one well-known example of this. Several hundred years before Jesus was born, the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew into Greek (the "Septuagint", usually dated to the 3rd century BCE). When a passage in Isaiah which prophesizes that the Messiah will be born of a young woman (Is. 7:14) was translated, the Hebrew word for "young woman" was mistranslated as "virgin" in Greek. When the authors of the Gospels read this mistranslation, they thought that, to qualify as the Messiah, his mother had to be a virgin, and so they fabricated the story of the virgin birth. In fact, it only became necessary to invent this story because of a mistranslation. So, it is not that

prophecies foretold events in Jesus's life, but rather that events in Jesus's life were fabricated to fit the prophecies.

### **The Birth of Jesus**

We often hear Christians boast that no one has ever found a mistake in the Bible, just as we often hear them claim that the Bible is the inspired word of God and, therefore, infallible. Considering how carefully they read the Bible, it is difficult to know how such claims can be made, much less believed.

Let us have a look at what the Bible says about the birth of Jesus. In one place, we are told that news of the impending birth of Jesus was conveyed to Joseph in a dream:

*The birth of Jesus Christ took place as follows: While his mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they had slept together, she was found to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Since Joseph her betrothed was a good man and did not wish to expose her publicly, he planned to break off their engagement quietly. While he was thinking about these things, a messenger of the Lord surprised him in a dream with these words: "Joseph, descendant of David, do not hesitate to take Mary as your wife, since the Holy Spirit is responsible for her pregnancy. She will give birth to a son and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins". (Matt. 1:18—20.)*

Then in another, we are told that the news was given to Mary, Jesus's mother, by an angel:

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus". (Lk. 1:26—31.)*

Which of these two stores is true? Was it Joseph who got the news or Mary? Christians will say that they both got it, but then why does the Gospel of Matthew fail to mention the angel appearing to Mary and the Gospel of Luke fail to mention Joseph's dream?

On one hand, we are told that his parents went on a journey before Jesus was born:

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. (Lk. 2:1—5.)*

On the other hand, we are told that Joseph and Mary went on a journey after his birth:



*Now, when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. (Matt. 2:13—15.)*

Which of these two stories is true?

Now, when we come to where Jesus was actually born, we meet more contradictions. Was Jesus born at home (Matt. 1:24—25), or was he born in a manger at the back of an inn (Lk. 2:7)?

Next, we come the Jesus's ancestry. We have two lists of Jesus's ancestors on Joseph's side of the family, but when we look at the names on these lists, we find that there is almost no agreement between them. They do not even agree about the name of Jesus's grandfather. One list says that his grandfather's name was Jacob (Matt. 1:16), and the other says that his name was Heli (Lk. 3:23). Moreover, it is ridiculous to talk about Jesus's ancestors on Joseph's side of the family and Jesus being related to King David (Matt. 1:1), when, according to Christian doctrine, God is supposed to be Jesus's real father and not Joseph.

Finally, the Talmudic commentary on the Mishnah (the Gemara) claims that Jesus was the misbegotten son of a Jewish mother and a Roman soldier named Tiberius Julius Abdes Panthera (ca. 22 BCE—40 CE), who was stationed in Judea as a young man, around the time of Jesus's conception. Not unsurprisingly, the authenticity of this claim has been challenged. Then again, the same claim was made in the second century CE by the anti-Christian Greek philosopher, historian, and author Celsus. Panthera's tombstone was discovered in Bingerbrück, Germany, in October 1859, during the construction of a railroad, together with the tombstones of eight other Roman soldiers. He was 62 years old at the time of his death. Panthera's tombstone is currently housed in the Römerhalle museum in Bad Kreuznach, Germany.

### Was Jesus a Good Teacher?

At the time of the Buddha, there was a religious sect called the "Nigaṇṭhas" (the Jains), which fell apart soon after the death of its founder Nātaputta:

*At that time, the Nigaṇṭha Nātaputta had just died at Pāvā. And at his death, the Nigaṇṭhas were split into two factions, quarrelling and disputing, fighting and attacking each other with wordy warfare: "You do not understand this doctrine and discipline — I do!" "How could you understand this doctrine and discipline?" "Your way is all wrong — mine is right!" "I am consistent — you are not!" "You said last what should have been said first, and you said first what you should have said last!" "What you took so long to think up has been refuted!" "Your argument has been overthrown, you are defeated!" "Go on, save your doctrine — get out of that if you can!" You would have thought the Nigaṇṭhas, Nātaputta's disciples, were bent on killing each other. Even the white-robed lay followers were disgusted, displeased, and repelled when they saw that their doctrine and discipline was so ill-proclaimed, so unedifyingly displayed, and so ineffectual in calming the passions, having been proclaimed by one not fully enlightened, and now with its support gone, without an arbiter. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 29.)*

Interestingly enough, this is exactly what happened as soon as Jesus died and for exactly the same reasons. Jesus is famous for the parables he used to illustrate his ideas, but at the same time, he often failed to make their meaning clear. Sometimes, this was because he himself was unclear about his ideas, and at other times, it seems that he was just a poor communicator. What is even more bizarre is that Jesus seems to have sometimes deliberately obscured his message:

*And when his disciples asked him what the parable meant, he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of God: but for others they are parables, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. (Lk. 8:9—10; Mk. 8:17—18.)*

*But they did not understand this saying, and it was concealed from them, that they could not perceive it: and they were afraid to ask him about his saying. (Lk. 9:45.)*

Add to this deliberate obscurity the numerous contradictory ideas in the teachings of Jesus, and it is not hard to see why his disciples fell into disagreement as soon as he died. In the Epistles, there are numerous references to the bickering and squabbling among the various factions of the early Christians. Paul complained that all the churches in Asia had turned against him (2 Tim. 1:15) and that they refused to take his side in some theological argument (2 Tim. 4:14—16). He tells us of his squabble with Peter and the elders of the church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:11—13), of how he was snubbed by the church at Philippi (1 Thess. 3:1—13), of teaching "another Christ" and of not really knowing God (Tit. 1:10—16). John bitterly complained that his opponents threw his supporters out of the church (Jn. 1:9—10). Paul made a desperate but futile appeal for harmony among the early Christians:

*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree with one another that there may be no divisions between you and that you might be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Cor. 1:10—12.)*

What were the early Christians squabbling over? Just about everything. But one of the numerous points of disagreement between them seems to have been on the issue of whether it was necessary for males to be circumcised (Rom. 2:25—29; Gal. 5:2—12; Gal. 6:12—15; Phil. 3:2—4; Col. 2:11—13). Paul was against it and called those who disagreed with him "dogs" (Phil. 3:2), said that he hoped they would go all the way and castrate themselves (Gal. 5:12), and he warned other Christians to keep away from them (Tit. 1:10). All of this is reminiscent of modern Christians. While confidently proclaiming that they alone have the truth, there is almost no agreement between them about what that truth is. They have split into hundreds of mutually hostile denominations, sects, cults, and churches and cannot even sit down with each other and worship the same God together. For Buddhists, this is all very bewildering. If it is true that Jesus's Gospel of salvation is so clear and if it is true that God communicates with and guides Christians through prayer as they claim, why is it that there is so much disagreement and ill-will among them? Why are there so many churches, and which one, if any, is the true one?

Some of the early Christian sects include the Ebionites, the Marcionites, the Gnostics, the Phibionites (also known as the "Borborites"), and the so-called "Proto-Orthodox".

## The Last Supper

The Bible gives us almost no information about the life of Jesus until he started teaching at about the age of thirty. And even after his public ministry started, there is great confusion about what happened and when. For instance, the Gospel of John claims that the cleansing of the temple took place at the beginning of Jesus's ministry (Jn. 2:13—14), but the Gospel of Luke claims that it took place at the end (Lk. 19:45—46). In one place, we are told that Jesus stayed in Peter's house and then healed a leper (Mk. 1:29—45), while in another, we are told that he healed the leper and then went into Peter's house (Matt. 8:1—2, 8:14). On the other hand, we are told that the centurion spoke personally to Jesus (Matt. 8:5); in a complete contradiction to this, we are told that the centurion sent people on his behalf to speak to Jesus (Lk. 7:1). In the Gospel of Mark, we are told that Jesus left Tyre and passed through Sidon on his way to the Sea of Galilee (Mk. 7:31). A look at any map of Israel will show that this is quite impossible, since Sidon is in another direction altogether.

Christians will reluctantly admit these mistakes but say that they are minor and of no significance. Perhaps so, but they do prove that the Bible is not infallible, and, if the Bible makes mistakes about what Jesus did, it could just as easily make mistakes about what he said. Moreover, even when we look at very important events in Jesus's life, we find confusion. Let us have a look at the Last Supper. According to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the Last Supper took place on the Jewish holy day of Passover (Matt. 26:17—20; Mk. 14:12—17; Lk. 22:7—14). The Gospel of John, on the other hand, claims that it took place on the day before Passover (Jn. 19:14). If the authors of the Gospels could not even remember the day of the Last Supper correctly, how can we be certain that they remembered Jesus's teachings correctly?

## The Trial

Now, we will take a look at that most important event in the life of Jesus, his trial. As described in the Bible, the trial is predictably full of contradictions, but it also raises many questions which are difficult to answer. The trial and the events leading up to it are usually described by Christians like this: Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey to the acclaim of the people of the city. He was arrested by the henchmen of the Jewish priests, who beat him and handed him over to the Romans. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, could find no guilt in Jesus, but the Jewish priests kept insisting that he was guilty. Unable to make up his mind, the governor decided to ask the crowd what they wanted, either the release of Jesus or a Jewish rebel. The crowd cried out for the release of the rebel and the crucifixion of Jesus. So, Pilate reluctantly had him executed.

Could the trial really have proceeded like this? Let us have a look. We are told that when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, crowds of delighted people greeted him, laying their cloaks on the road, and praising him as their king (Mk. 11:8). But only a day later, a huge crowd was screaming out for him to be crucified (Mk. 15:12—14). This sudden change from adulation to hatred is hard to explain. Next, we have Jesus brought before Pontius Pilate. The Bible portrays Pilate as a man who can find no guilt in Jesus but who is pushed into crucifying him by the Jewish priests. This is clearly impossible. The Romans were famous for their strong and effective government, their judicial system was known for its justice, and they did not send weak, indecisive men to govern troublesome parts of the empire. Who could believe that a

Roman governor would allow the people he ruled to make up his mind for him and tell him how to run his own court? The Bible says that Pilate asked the crowd whether they wanted either Jesus or Barabbas released (Lk. 23:13—18), and when the said Barrabas, he was set free and Jesus was executed. Now, credibility has been stretched to the limit. We are asked to believe that a Roman governor would execute a man he believed to be innocent and set free a rebel involved in murder and trying to overthrow Roman rule (Lk. 23:19). The Romans did not conquer Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East by releasing dangerous rebels. They were completely ruthless with all who opposed them. So, the Christian account of Jesus's trial is unconvincing.

If we read what Jesus is supposed to have said at his trial, we can see that all of the accounts of the trial are fabrications. According to the Gospel of Matthew, during the trial, Jesus “gave no answer” (Matt. 27:12) and “made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor” (Matt. 27:14). In a complete contradiction to this, the Gospel of John claims that Jesus answered charges, asked questions, and spoke much during his trial (Jn. 18:33—37). Which of these two accounts is the true one? Was Jesus silent or did he speak? Like the Gospel of John, the Gospel of Luke also claims that Jesus spoke during his trial. But if we compare John's account of what was said with Luke's account, we find that almost every sentence is different (compare Jn. 18:33—37 with Lk. 22:66—70). Obviously, Christian claims that the Bible is an accurate, reliable historical document are completely bogus.

### **What Happened to Judas?**

According to the Bible, Judas was the disciple who betrayed Jesus. After he had done this, he is said to have died. But how did he die? Here, as with many other incidents, the Bible gives several conflicting accounts. According to the Gospel of Matthew, this is what happened:

*When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and elders. “I have sinned” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood”. “What is that to us”, they replied, “That is your responsibility!” So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the money and said, “It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money”. So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the field of blood to this day. (Matt. 27:3—8.)*

Elsewhere, we are told a different story:

*With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, field of blood. (Acts 1:18—19.)*

Was it Judas who bought the field, or was it the chief priests? Did Judas hang himself, or did he fall down and have his body burst open?

### **Jesus's Last Words**

Many Christian doctrines are based on a phrase or sentence which Jesus is supposed to have spoken. To prove the truth of their beliefs, Christians will rush to their Bibles and often point to a single sentence as proof. They assume that every phrase, every sentence, every word in the Bible is exactly what Jesus said. We have already seen that the Bible is quite confused about what Jesus did and said. In fact, even Jesus's last words have not been accurately recorded. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus's last words were: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). According to the Gospel of Mark, he just gave a loud cry and died (Mk. 15:37). According to the Gospel of Luke, he said: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus's last words were: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). Once again, we have discrepancies and contradictions which make it impossible to know what, if anything, Jesus actually said.

### **The Resurrection**

The most important event in the life of Jesus and the cornerstone of Christian faith is supposed to be the resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul very correctly said, "If Christ has not been raised our preaching is empty and our belief comes to nothing" (1 Cor. 15:14). With unusual frankness, he also admitted that the idea of Jesus's resurrection can somehow save sinners makes no sense (1 Cor. 1:21). The informed Buddhist would agree with Paul on this matter. When Paul preached about Jesus's resurrection in Athens, the cradle of logic, reason, and philosophy, people just laughed at him (Acts 17:32). Buddhists are too polite to laugh at the idea of resurrection, but they can find no good reason why they should believe it. Let us examine what the Bible says about the resurrection. At this point, the reader is advised to have a Bible ready and to check the references.

### **The Death of Jesus**

According to the Gospel of Matthew, when Jesus died, the curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom and other strange things happened. But most extraordinary of all, Matthew claims that numerous people who had recently died came out of their graves and walked around in Jerusalem (Matt. 27:52). If this is true, it must have been one of the most amazing events in history. People must have been talking about it for years. News of it must have spread far and wide, and at least some of those who came back to life must have written something about their astonishing experience. It is totally incomprehensible, therefore, that this extraordinary event is not mentioned in any of the historical documents of the time, including even the other Gospels.

1. When did the resurrection happen? All four Gospels say that the events described took place early on Sunday morning (Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1). This is the only detail concerning the resurrection on which all the Gospels agree.
2. Who went to the tomb? Now, the problems begin. According to the Gospel of Matthew, it was the two Marys who went to the tomb (Matt. 28:1); the Gospel of Mark says that the two Marys and Salome went (Mk. 16:1); the Gospel of Luke says that the two Marys, Joanna, and

some other women went (Lk. 24:10); and the Gospel of John says that Mary went alone (Jn. 20:1). Christians claim that the Bible contains no mistakes, but, surely, there are a few mistakes here. Christians further claim that those who wrote the Gospels were inspired by God as they wrote, but apparently not inspired enough to be able to count properly.

3. Was there an earthquake? The Gospel of Matthew says that, at the time, there was a “great earthquake” (Matt. 28:2), but why do the other three Gospels fail to mention it? Surely, a great earthquake, especially occurring at such a significant moment, would be hard to forget. It is far more likely that Matthew just made up the story to add drama to his account — in other words, he lied.
4. How many angels appeared? The Gospel of Matthew claims that an angel appeared before the women, rolled back the stone blocking the entrance to Jesus’s tomb, and sat upon it (Matt. 28:2). Matthew also says that the guards were so frightened that they fainted (Matt. 28:4). Mark’s story is quite different. He claims that the stone had already been removed from the entrance before the women arrived, so they went into the tomb and saw the angel inside (Mk. 16:4—5). And Mark does not mention any guards. Luke’s story is even more inventive. Luke claims that the women went into the tomb and saw not one but two angels (Lk. 24:4). Obviously, someone is not telling the truth. John claims that Mary went to the tomb alone, saw the tomb open, ran to get the other disciples, and when they went into the tomb, she waited outside. After everyone went home, Mary waited, and as she did, two angels appeared to her and then Jesus appeared, although she could not recognize him (Jn. 20:12—14). And it is upon this garbled “evidence” that Christianity rests.
5. Post-resurrection appearances. There are several accounts in the Gospels of Jesus appearing to his disciples and others after his supposed resurrection, but all of these raise more questions than they answer. For example, the Apostle Paul says that Jesus appeared to a crowd of five hundred people, many of whom he claimed were still alive (1 Cor. 15:6). One would think that having five hundred eyewitnesses to such an event would be conclusive proof that it actually happened. Hence, it is strange that Paul neglected to say where this amazing event happened or give the name of even one of these eyewitnesses. It is equally strange that not one of them ever wrote about what they saw. Stranger still is the fact that this appearance is not mentioned in the four Gospels. It is well-known that people tend to elaborate their stories the more often they repeat them, and even more so if they are trying to impress or convince others. It is also well-known that those who lie cannot always remember the lies they have told and wind up contradicting themselves. The accounts of Paul’s experience of the resurrected Jesus are a good example of these tendencies. First, it is claimed that Paul was blinded by a light and then heard a voice. His companions remained standing and heard the voice, although they could not see the light (Acts 9:3—8). Later, when Paul repeats the tale, he reverses it, saying that his companions fell to the ground (Acts 26:14) and saw the light, although they could not hear the voice (Acts 22:9). Further, each time Paul recounts what Jesus is supposed to have said to him, it gets a bit longer and more detailed (compare Acts 9:6 with Acts 26:15—18). Such are the vary dubious “testimonies” that form the foundations of Christianity.
6. Records of the resurrection. When were these accounts of the resurrection written and by whom? Over the last two centuries, scholars have examined the four Gospels in minute detail and from almost every conceivable perspective. Probably no literature in history has been so thoroughly and carefully studied. And this is the conclusion scholars have come to: None of the Gospels were written by the disciples of Jesus, that is, Matthew, Mark, Luke, or

John. As to their age, the Gospel of Mark was written about 40 years after the death of Jesus, while the Gospel of Luke was written about 75 to 80 years after his death. The Gospel of Matthew was written between 80 and 90 years after Jesus's death and is largely copied from Mark, while the Gospel of John was probably written after 100 CE. All of the Gospels have been edited — for example, Mark's account of Jesus rising from the dead (Mk. 16:9—19) was not part of the original but was added years later. To sum up, none of the Gospels give an eyewitness account of the resurrection or even a second or third-hand account of it, and all of them were written decades after the events they claim to report.

7. What did happen? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, what did happen to him? Since we have no evidence apart from the Bible, we will probably never know for sure, but we can make an intelligent guess. We know that there was a lot of trouble in Jerusalem at the time, some of it caused by Jesus himself, and the authorities must have been anxious to keep the peace. It is quite possible that either the Jewish priests or the Romans removed Jesus's body from the tomb so that it could not become the focus of more trouble. We know that the authorities placed guards at Jesus's tomb, suggesting that they may have thought his body might be removed (Matt. 28:4). To be sure, there is no more evidence for this scenario than there is for the Christian explanation, but it is a thousand times more probable and believable. If someone came to you saying that they saw a dead man come to life, rise up into the sky, and disappear into the clouds, you would probably be very skeptical because such things go so much against ordinary experience. If you asked whether anyone else had seen this happen and they replied that five hundred people witnessed it and you asked for the names of some of these eyewitnesses but they were unable to provide the name of even one, you would probably become quite suspicious. If you then asked when all of this was supposed to have happened and they said more than 40 years ago (the Gospel of Mark, the earliest Gospel, was written about 40 years after the death of Jesus), you could hardly be blamed for dismissing the whole thing as a delusion, as hearsay, or as a tall story.

### Was Jesus God?

Christians claim that Jesus was God. Let us see whether there is any justification for this outrageous claim. If Jesus really was God, it is very strange that he never said so. There is not one single place in the whole of the New Testament where Jesus himself simply and unambiguously proclaims, "I am God". Christians will object to this and say that Jesus often called himself or was called the "Son of God". However, the Bible clearly shows that any good person who had strong faith qualified to be called a "son of God". For example, Jesus called Adam a "son of God" (Lk. 3:38). Also:

*It will happen that in the very place where it was said of them "You are not my people" they will be called "sons of the living God". (Rom. 9:26.)*

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be the sons of your father in Heaven. (Matt. 5:44—45.)*

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26.)*

*You are God's; you are all sons of the Most High. (Ps. 82:6.)*

Jesus is called God's "only begotten son", but even this is not unique. In the Psalms, God says to King David, "You are my son, today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7). Further, Jesus distinctly said that, when he called himself a "son of God", he did not mean that he was God or related to God in a literal sense. When the Jewish priests criticized him for claiming to be equal with God, Jesus replied:

*Is it not written in your law, "I have said you are gods?" If he called them "gods" to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken — what about one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? (Jn. 10:34—36.)*

Christians will protest that in these quotes, "son of god" is not written in capital letters, but when Jesus makes his claims, capitals are used, thus, "Son of God". But capital letters to make a phrase stand out or to give it emphasis is an innovation of modern written English. In ancient Greek and Aramaic, the languages in which the New Testament was written, capital letters were never used, and so the distinction between "son of god" and "Son of God" did not exist. Christians make an enormous fuss about Jesus's claims to be a son of God, but as we can see, there is absolutely nothing unique in this claim. Christians could say that the term "Son of God" is used in the Bible in two different ways — (1) as a title for a particularly holy person and (2) for the actual son of God, Jesus, who was with God in Heaven before coming to earth. But even in this second sense, Jesus was not unique. The Bible tells us that God had numerous sons with him in Heaven who later came to earth and lived with humans just as Jesus is supposed to have done:

*When mankind began to increase and spread all over the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; so they took for themselves such women as they chose. (Gen. 6:1—3.)*

In the Bible, Jesus is called the "Son of Man" more than eighty times. Yet the Bible also tells us that, in the eyes of God, the Son of Man is nothing more than a worm (Job 25:6). How can Christians claim that the Son of Man is God, when the Bible itself says that the Son of Man is nothing more than a lowly worm?

Christians will then insist that Jesus was called the "Messiah", and that this proves that he was God. The Hebrew word *mashiah*, of which the Greek translation is *christos*, simply means "anointed one" and refers to anyone sent by God to help the people of Israel. The Bible even calls the pagan Persian King Cyrus a "Messiah" ("anointed one") because he let the Jews return to their homeland (Is. 45:1). So just because Jesus was called "Messiah" does not prove that he was God. In fact, throughout the Gospels, Jesus goes out of his way to make it clear that he is NOT God. When someone called Jesus "good teacher", he said:

*Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. (Lk. 18:19.)*

Now, if Jesus were God, why would he deny that he was good? We are told that Jesus prayed to God, but if he were God, why would he need to pray to himself? And when Jesus prayed, he said to God, "not my will but yours" (Lk. 22:42). Quite clearly, he was making a



distinction between God's will and his own. Jesus said that no one has ever seen God (Jn. 1:18), meaning that, when people saw him, they were not seeing God. And again, Jesus said that he can do nothing without God:

*I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father do. (Jn. 5:19.)*

*By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me. (Jn. 5:30.)*

*I can do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. (Jn. 8:28.)*

If Jesus were God, he could do anything he wanted to do, and in these passages and dozens of others, he is making it crystal clear that he is one thing and God is another. Jesus said, "The Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28), emphasizing again that he was not as great as God and, therefore, different from him. Jesus said:

*Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. (Lk. 12:10.)*

Moreover, if Jesus and the Holy Spirit were the same, to blaspheme one would be the same as blaspheming the other.

In the Bible, we are told that no one born of a woman can be pure (Job 25:4). Jesus was born of a woman, his mother Mary, so he likewise must have been impure, and if he was impure, how could he be God? We are told that Jesus was dead for three days before ascending into Heaven. How can God possibly die? Who was looking after the universe while he was dead? Jesus said that, at the end of the world, he would be sitting at the right hand of God to judge the world (Lk. 22:69). If Jesus and God are the same, how would it be possible for them to sit next to each other? To do this, they would have to be separate and different. And anyway, King David is described as sitting on the right hand of God (Ps. 110:1), so to do this, one does not have to be anything other than a good human being. We are told that Jesus stands between God and man:

*For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ. (1 Tim. 2:5.)*

This passage clearly states that Jesus is not God, for if he were, how could he stand between God and men? It also specifically calls Jesus a "man" (see also Acts 17:30—31). In the Gospels of Matthew (Matt. 1:16) and Luke (Lk. 3:23), we are given the names of Jesus's father, his father's father, and so on, back through many generations. If God were really Jesus's father, why do these Gospels go to the trouble of listing all of Jesus's ancestors on his father's side? Christians are forever claiming that Jesus is God and, at the same time, that he is the son of God. But how can this be possible? And to make matters even more confused, the Holy Spirit is brought in, and we are asked to believe that Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit are all different and yet all the same. Both the Jewish and particularly the Islamic concepts of God are much more

logical than this in that they say that God is unambiguously unitary, has no gender, and does not have children.

The claim of Christians that Jesus is God contradicts what the Bible says, it goes against common sense, and it raises numerous logical and theological problems. Whereas, if we see Jesus as he most likely was, a charismatic Rabbi, who sought, on the one hand, to purify what he saw as corruptions of Judaism and, on the other, who was opposed to Roman rule in Judea, none of these problems arise. Indeed, it was for the latter offense that he was crucified by the Roman authorities.

To conclude, it may be noted that the Ebionites — an early Christian sect mentioned above — believed that Jesus was just a Messiah, not a god. They also believed that he was conceived and born like everyone else and not literally the “son of God”, but, rather, God’s adopted son. The Marcionites — another early Christian sect mentioned above — regarded Jesus as a spiritual being sent to reveal the truth about existence and not a Jewish Messiah. They also rejected the wrathful God of the Old Testament and substituted a second God of love and mercy.

### **How Did Jesus Become God?**

It seems inconceivable nowadays that a mere human being could be regarded as a god, but the situation was very different in antiquity. During the time of Jesus, Israel was a land in political and social turmoil. Most people were ignorant, illiterate, and superstitious, and wild rumors were readily listened to and believed. There were numerous people passing themselves off as prophets, messiahs, wonder workers, and saviors of the Jewish people. Some of these, like Simon Magus, were apparently able to perform miracles similar to those done by Jesus (Acts 8, 9, ff.). Others, like Theudas and Judas the Galilean, attracted large followings, again just as Jesus did (Acts 5:36; Acts 5:37). One of these characters even had a name almost identical to Jesus (Acts 13:6). When the Apostle Paul and his companions healed a man in Lystra, a huge crowd gathered and began worshipping them as gods. Paul was horrified and tried to explain that he and his friends were only human, but “even these words could hardly keep the crowd from offering sacrifices to them” (Acts 14:18). Most Roman emperors were considered divine after they died, and temples were built in which to worship them. Clearly, this was a time when any charismatic person could attract a large following and could even be proclaimed a god. It happened to others, and it happened to Jesus too.

### **Was Jesus Perfect?**

If a religious teacher were truly perfect, we would expect the behavior of such a person to be unfailingly blameless, their teachings to be humane and practical, and there to be consistency between what they preached and how they behaved. Jesus, of course, denied that he was perfect (Lk. 18:19), but despite this and all the evidence in the Bible, Christians continue to claim that he was perfect. They have to do this because they mistakenly believe that he was God, and how can one have an imperfect god? Buddhists believe that, because Jesus was not enlightened, he was not perfect. Like other unenlightened people, he sometimes did wrong, some of the things he taught were impractical, and sometimes he failed to practice what he preached. Let us examine the evidence.

Jesus's ethical teachings are often described as "sublime", "lofty", "utterly perfect", etc. But are they? Let us begin by looking at his teachings on divorce. In the Old Testament, divorce was allowed under certain circumstances, which, of course, is the most humane thing to do when a couple no longer loves each other. But Jesus took an extreme position on divorce saying that it was allowable only on the grounds of adultery:

*It has been said, "Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce". But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced also commits adultery. (Matt. 5:31—33.)*

This horrendous teaching has meant that, in Christian countries until relatively recently, millions of couples were trapped in unhappy, loveless marriages because they were unable to get a divorce. It also meant that countless women who did manage to get a divorce from their husbands even without committing adultery were branded as adulterers if they married again. This teaching of Jesus has caused untold misery and heartbreak.

Another example of Jesus's less than perfect teachings is his attitude toward money. He seems to have had a deep resentment for the rich:

*But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. (Lk. 6:24—25.)*

While it is true that the rich are sometimes greedy and inconsiderate (as are some who are poor), no mention is made of this. The rich are condemned simply because they are rich. Once when a young man pressed for an answer to the question of how he could have eternal life, Jesus finally said:

*If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor and follow me and you will have treasure in Heaven. (Matt. 19:21.)*

Jesus even went so far as to say that it is virtually impossible for a rich person to go to Heaven:

*Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. (Matt. 19:23—24.)*

Christians, of course, have never taken notice of these sayings of Jesus, but if they did, the economies of most Christian countries would collapse, and all the good qualities that honest entrepreneurship can engender would disappear.

These rather impractical and unfair ideas contrast very sharply with the Buddha's attitude toward wealth. The Buddha recognized that wealth honestly earned can be a source of goodness and happiness:

*What is the happiness of ownership? Herein, a householder has wealth acquired by energetic striving, won by strength of arm and sweat of brow, justly and lawfully won. When he thinks of this, he feels happiness and satisfaction.*

*And what is the happiness of wealth? Herein, a householder has wealth justly and lawfully won, and with it, he does many good deeds. When he thinks of this, he feels happiness and satisfaction.*

*And what is the happiness of freedom from debt? Herein, a householder owes no debt large or small to anyone, and when he thinks of this, he feels happiness and satisfaction. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Fives, Sutta no. 41.)*

The Buddha also understood that, with right attitude, the wealthy can do great good with their money:

*With wealth acquired by energetic striving, won by strength of arm and sweat of brow lawfully and justly, a noble disciple makes himself, his mother and father, his wife and children, his servants and workmen, and his friends and acquaintances cheerful and happy — he creates perfect happiness. This is the first opportunity seized by him, used for good, and appropriately made use of. (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Fives, Sutta no. 41.)*

Thus, rather than dismissing the rich wholesale from the religious life as Jesus did, the Buddha taught them to earn their money honestly and to use it for the benefit of themselves and the general community.

One aspect of the teachings of Jesus that many thoughtful people find disturbing is his depreciation of critical and independent thinking. He praised more highly those who believed without seeing than those who asked for evidence (Jn. 20:28). Once, he said that, unless a person becomes like a little child, they cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 18:3). Small children are, of course, naïve, trusting, and often believe anything they are told. But how are we going to separate truth from falsehood and right from wrong with an attitude like this? Is it wise to just blindly believe anything we are told? There are many false and even evil ideologies being promoted today, and common sense demands that we scrutinize in a very mature manner before accepting them.

*So far as I can remember, there is not one word in the Gospels in praise of intelligence.*

— Bertrand Russell

The Buddha, on the other hand, always encouraged people to make a careful and thorough inquiry before believing any ideas, including His own. When the Kālāmas said that they did not know how to choose between various competing doctrines, the Buddha said to them:

*“Come, O Kālāmas: Do not accept anything on mere hearsay [that is, thinking that thus have we heard it from ancient times]. Do not accept anything by mere tradition [that is, thinking that thus has it been handed down through many generations]. Do not accept anything on account of rumors [that is, by believing what others say without any investigation]. Do not accept anything just because it agrees with your scriptures. Do not accept anything by mere supposition. Do not accept anything by mere inference. Do*

*not accept anything by merely considering appearances. Do not accept anything merely because it agrees with your preconceived ideas. Do not accept anything merely because it seems acceptable [that is, should be accepted]. Do not accept anything merely out of respect for the teacher [and that, therefore, it is proper to accept his word].*

*“But, when you know for yourselves — these things are not moral, these things are blameworthy, these things are condemned by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, lead to ruin and sorrow, then, indeed, it is proper to reject them.*

*“When you know for yourselves — these things are moral, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when performed and undertaken, lead to well-being and happiness, then, indeed, do not reject them.” (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Threes, Sutta no. 65. Note: The bracketed explanatory parts are in accordance of the interpretations found in the Commentary and Sub-commentary.)*

In this important teaching, the Buddha tells that we should first conduct a thorough investigation. Next, He tells us to reject those things which we know to be false, harmful, evil, and immoral. Finally, He tells us to accept those things which we know to be true, beneficial, blameless, and moral.

Another problem with Jesus as an ethical teacher concerns the numerous important moral issues on which he failed to give any guidance. For example, slavery was an inhumane and widespread institution during his time, and yet, he was completely silent about it. He says nothing about racial discrimination, domestic violence, war, or the problems of alcohol or drugs. Other crucial issues, like how societies should be governed, the ethics of war, the administration of justice, the treatment of animals, economics, or medical ethics, are not addressed either. On the other hand, there are numerous ideas that Jesus did teach which even the most enthusiastic fundamentalist or evangelical Christian would be reluctant to practice or even agree with. Jesus said that we should not resist those who do evil (Matt. 5:39), although most people today would say that not countering evil is the height of irresponsibility. Jesus taught that just to look at a woman with lust amounted to committing adultery (Matt. 5:27), which pretty much makes every male an adulterer. Jesus said that, if we call someone a fool in a moment of anger, we will be condemned to eternal punishment in Hell (Matt. 5:21), so presumably, most of us are destined for the fiery furnace. Jesus said that poor people will always be with us (Matt. 26:11), which is hardly an incentive to try to eradicate poverty and depravation. Jesus even said that, if we do wrong with our hand or tongue, we should cut them off (Matt. 5:30), which seems extreme by any standard.

But the teaching of Jesus that has caused more problems than any other is his claim that he and he alone can give salvation (Jn. 14:6). It follows axiomatically from this that all other religions lead to the only alternative to salvation — Hell — and are, therefore, evil. Sadly, this claim by Jesus is the root of that very characteristic Christian trait — intolerance. Christianity has always equated non-belief in Jesus with evil and has denigrated non-believers as godless, wicked, stubborn, pagan, scoffers, followers of false prophets, idol worshippers, and the like:

*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? (2 Cor. 6:14—16.)*

In this passage, the Apostle Paul asks what a Christian can possibly have in common with, for example, a Buddhist. For Paul, as also for contemporary Christians, the fact that a Buddhist may value and practice love, compassion, charity, patience, humility, and truthfulness counts for nothing. For Christians, the single fact that Buddhists do not believe in Jesus automatically puts them on the side of wickedness and darkness and condemns them to Hell. This is the great tragedy of Christianity — the stronger the Christian's faith, the more partisan, bigoted, and intolerant he or she usually becomes. What a relief it is to be able to take refuge in the Buddha and still be able to respect and admire other inspirational teachers and teachings. How pleasant it is to be able to communicate with others without the need to always be trying to convert them. How nice it is to be happy when one sees others happy with their religion. Christianity is intolerant because it is obsessed with Jesus and excludes everyone who does not accept him. Buddhism is tolerant because it values wisdom and compassion wherever they are found, and it can embrace anyone who upholds these virtues.

### **Lack of Originality**

Christians claim that Jesus's teaching of love and compassion — things that had never been taught before — is strong evidence of his uniqueness and divinity. Nothing could be further from the truth. Perhaps Jesus's most famous saying is "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Though this is a very important saying, it is certainly not original. In uttering these words, Jesus was doing nothing more than quoting Leviticus 19:18, which was written some four or five hundred years before his time. Everyone, even many non-Christians, know the so-called "Golden Rule", "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12). What most people do not know is that an older contemporary of Jesus, the Jewish Rabbi Hillel, taught almost the same thing, "What you do not like, do not do to your neighbor" (Sabbath 31:1). Even fewer people know that the Chinese sage Confucius taught the Golden Rule five hundred years before Jesus was born: "Zigong asked: 'Is there a single saying that could be a guide for one's entire life?' The Master replied: 'Do not do to others what you would not like done to you'." (Lun Yu 15:24). But not surprisingly, the first to teach the Golden Rule was neither Hillel nor Confucius, and certainly not Jesus, but the Buddha. Although using a different formulation, the Buddha taught exactly the same idea in the *Sutta Nipāta* 705, where He says: "Thinking thus, 'As I am, so are others; as others are, so am I', identify yourself with others and harm none nor cause them to be harmed".

Christians like to usurp for Jesus uniqueness in teaching humility, non-retaliation, and forgiveness and quote as proof of this the famous exhortation, "If someone strikes you on the cheek turn the other cheek" (Lk. 6:29). But once again, the Buddha practiced and taught his disciples the same values more than a half millennium earlier. In the famous Kakacūpama Sutta, the Buddha says:

*Even if bandits were to cut you limb to limb with a two-handled saw, if you had hatred towards them, you would not be practicing my teaching. This is how you should train yourself, "Our minds shall remain unaffected, and we shall speak no evil words. We shall abide full of compassion for their welfare, with a mind devoid of hatred and filled with loving-kindness. We shall abide radiating loving-kindness towards them; and starting with them, we shall abide radiating the whole world with a mind filled with*

*loving-kindness, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, and without hatred or ill will.” This is how you should train yourselves. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 21.)*

The well-known Christian theologian Georgia Harkness, in her book *Christian Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press [1957]), says, “Point for point, there is nothing in the teaching of Jesus which cannot be found in the Old Testament or in the rabbinical teaching”. As can be seen, there is nothing in the teaching of Jesus of an ethical nature that cannot be found elsewhere. This is not to belittle Jesus as a moral teacher, but merely to refute the false Christian boast that he was the first person to teach love-based ethics.

## **Hell**

Jesus taught at least two different ideas about what happens after death. According to the first idea, when someone dies, he or she will be judged and then assigned either to Heaven or Hell (Lk. 16:19—23). According to the second idea, when people die, they will remain in their graves until Jesus returns and only then come before him to be judged. Clearly, he had no idea what would happen and was only speculating. However, Jesus was quite clear that Hell is the only alternative to Heaven and that Hell is a place of unending punishment. Without any doubt, this is the most unattractive of Jesus’s teachings. Behind all his gentleness and his exhortations to love and forgive lurks the terrible threat of eternal damnation. Most liberal Christians are very uncomfortable with these ideas and try to make them sound a little better by rationalizing them. First, they will try to free Jesus or God from responsibility by saying that they do not send us to Hell but that we send ourselves there by our evil actions. This flatly contradicts the Bible, which repeatedly says that the dead are judged before being assigned to Hell. This judgment is not an automatic process but the result of a conscious decision on the part of Jesus or God:

*Your stubborn refusal to repent is only adding to the anger God will have towards you on the day of anger when his judgment will be known. (Rom. 2:5.)*

In the parable of the Ten Minas, Jesus tells of a king who gave his servants a task to do and then went away. When he returned, some of the servants had followed the king’s instructions and some had not, and at the conclusion of the parable, Jesus has the king say:

*Those enemies of mine who do not want me to be king over them — bring them here before me and kill them. (Lk. 19:27.)*

The meaning of the parable is obvious, that Jesus will personally judge and punish those who reject him. In the Parable of the Weeds, a farmer is told by his servants that weeds are growing in his crops, and they ask if they should pull them out. But the farmer, who represents Jesus, says:

*Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters, collect the weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned, then gather the wheat and bring it to my barn. (Matt. 13:30.)*

Again, the meaning of the parable is plain enough — Jesus will order the punishment of non-believers and sinners.

Moreover, the Bible makes it clear that it is not primarily our actions that determine whether we go to Heaven or Hell, but our beliefs. A Christian with considerable character flaws will go to Heaven, while an ethical and compassionate non-believer will be damned for eternity. Not only will those who have failed to become Christians be punished, even those who have never heard of Jesus will be flung into eternal Hell. According to the Apostle Paul, the truths of Christianity are so obvious that everyone should know them, and if they do not, it is not because they are uninformed, but because they have deliberately chosen not to know them:

*The wrath of God is being revealed from Heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what can be known of God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For since the beginning of creation, God's invisible qualities, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen in the things that have been made, so men have no excuse. (Rom. 1:18—20.)*

This means that the overwhelming majority of people who have ever lived are in Hell, and most alive will go there as well. In 1960, the Congress of World Mission meeting in Chicago declared “in the years since World War II, more than a billion souls have passed into eternity and more than half of those went to the torment of hell fire without even hearing of Jesus Christ”. According to the authoritative *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press [2000]), under “Hell”, “the majority of human beings, most theologians agree, do end up in hell”.

The next way in which Christians try to explain away Hell is by saying that it is not really a place of torture and punishment but of purification or separation from God. Again, this directly contradicts the Bible. Jesus describes Hell as an “eternal fire that has been prepared by the Devil and his angels!” (Matt. 25:41) and as a place of “wailing and gnashing of teeth”, where the damned cry out for pity for water to quench their burning thirst (Lk. 16:24). Jesus even says that God’s power to cast us into eternal Hell should make us utterly terrified of him:

*I tell you my friends, do not fear those who put to death the body and then can do no more. I will tell you who to fear. Fear him who, after killing you, is able to throw you into Hell. This is who you should fear. (Lk. 12:4—5.)*

The torture of sinners and non-believers as described in the Revelation of John would have to be the most shocking piece of religious literature ever written. After relating how such people will be tortured for five months, John gloats, “They will long for death but death will be denied them” (Rev. 9:5—6). To a Buddhist, these and many other Biblical passages about Hell only serve to demonstrate a complete lack of love, compassion, and sympathy.

Another strategy used by Christians is to say that all these passages about Hell are not meant to be taken literally. But why not? If we are to take the idea of vicarious suffering, the resurrection, salvation, the incarnation, or the virgin birth at face value, why should we not do the same with the idea of eternal Hell? Why are Christians so ready to endorse some of Jesus’s ideas but so reluctant to even acknowledge others? Of course, the reason for this is very clear. To the modern civilized mind, the concept of eternal Hell for all non-Christians seems vindictive, vengeful, cruel, and unjust. Liberal Christians are embarrassed to admit that Jesus could have



conceived such a monstrous idea, despite all the evidence in the New Testament that he did. Evangelical and fundamentalist Christians are far less squeamish about Hell than their liberal brethren. They are only too happy to proclaim the reality of eternal hellfire and are quick to tell us that this will be our fate too if we do not believe in Jesus. In this sense, they are far less pleasant than liberal Christians, but at least they are more true to what Jesus taught.

## Miracles

One of the most bizarre things about Jesus was the miracles he is said to have performed. The most famous of these was bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Lazarus had been dead for at least four days and was presumably in Heaven, while his family was heartbroken and grieving (Jn. 11:1—44). In raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus certainly demonstrated his power, but what did Lazarus and his family get out of it? Lazarus was removed from Heaven and brought back to “this vale of tears” only to have to die all over again at some time in the future, while his family would have to go through the process of grieving and distress all over again. To a Buddhist, this miracle, even if it really happened, seems to be unnecessary and even cruel. How much more practical and humane was the Buddha’s approach to death. On one occasion, a young mother named Kisāgotamī came to the Buddha with her dead son, overcome with grief and pleading with the Buddha to give her son some medicine. Full of compassion, the Buddha told her to go and get a mustard seed from a house where no one had ever died. In the process of looking for such a seed, Kisāgotamī gradually came to realize that death is an integral part of life, and she overcame her grief (*Dhammapada Aṭṭhakathā*, Book 8:13). Jesus is alleged to have performed showy miracles which seemed to leave people much as they were before. The Buddha, on the other hand, gently and skillfully helped people to understand and accept the reality of death. This is what the Buddha meant when He said that education is the highest miracle (*Dīgha Nikāya*, Sutta no. 11).

Another miracle where Jesus seems to have given little thought to the consequences of what he was doing was the miracle he supposedly performed at Godara. A man was possessed by devils, and just before Jesus exorcised them, these devils asked him to send them into a nearby herd of pigs. Jesus obliged, sending the devils into the pigs, which then rushed screaming down the side of a cliff and into a lake, where they all drowned (Mk. 5:1—13). The possessed man must have been grateful for this, but one wonders what the owners of the pigs thought. The loss of their animals must have caused them great financial hardship. Not surprisingly, we are told that, after this incident, the people from the nearby village came to Jesus and begged him to leave their territory (Mk. 5:17). Note that the Gospel of Matthew tells the same story, but exaggerates it, claiming that not one but two men were exorcised (Matt. 8:28—32).

The supposed miracle at Godara also highlights Jesus’s utter disregard for nature. He could simply have expelled the devils, but instead, he chose to do it in a most cruel way by driving a large number of completely harmless and innocent animals to their deaths.

On another occasion, Jesus used his miraculous powers to kill a fig tree simply because it would not bear fruit (Matt. 21:18—20). Apparently, he never considered that animals could have eaten its leaves, birds could have nested in its branches, travelers could have rested in its shade, and its roots could have helped prevent erosion of the soil by rain and wind. Clearly, no advantage at all came from killing the tree — it was little more than an act of wanton vandalism.

While some of the supposed miracles performed by Jesus were pointless, others seem to have verged on the ridiculous. We are told that once Jesus was invited to a wedding. After some time, there was no wine left to drink, so Jesus turned large jars of water into wine (Jn. 2:1—11). No doubt, the host must have appreciated not having to go out to buy more alcohol, but it does seem a bit odd that God should incarnate as a human, come to earth, and use his powers just so that people would not run out of drinks at their parties.

### Inconsistency

What has been discussed above indicates that, while some of Jesus's teachings may have been good, other teachings were cruel, impractical, and in some cases, just silly. Perhaps it is not surprising that, not only have Christians often failed to practice Jesus's teachings, he often failed to practice them himself. He taught that we should love our neighbor, but he seems to have problems doing this himself. He believed that his teaching could lead people to Heaven, and yet he specifically instructed his disciples not to preach the Gospel to anyone but his own people, the Jews:

*Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. (Matt. 10:5—6.)*

When a poor distressed woman came to Jesus begging for help, he refused her simply because she was not Jewish. Teaching the Gospel to Canaanites was, he said, like taking food from children and throwing it to dogs:

*A Canaanite woman from the vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession". Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us". He answered: "I was sent only for the lost sheep of Israel". The woman came and knelt before him, "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs". (Matt. 15:22—26.)*

It was only after strong urging from his disciples that he finally decided to help the woman. So much for loving one's neighbor. Jesus taught that we should love our enemies, but again, he seemed to have difficulties doing this himself. When the Pharisees criticized him, he responded to them with a tirade of curses and insults (for example, Jn. 8:42—47; Matt. 23:13—36). Jesus said that we should not judge others (Matt. 7:12) and claimed that he himself judged no one (Jn. 8:15). But despite this, he was constantly judging and condemning others, often in a harsh and sweeping manner (Jn. 8:42—47; Matt. 23:13—16). In conformity with the Old Testament, Jesus taught that we must honor our mother and father (Matt. 19:19), but on other occasions, he taught and practiced the opposite:

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Lk. 14:26.)*

This demand that, to love Jesus, we must be prepared to hate others, even our own parents, seems to be very much at odds with the idea of honoring parents, let alone with the idea of loving our neighbor. Once, Jesus's mother and brothers came to see him while he was preaching only to be rudely rebuffed:

*And his mother and brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called to him. And a crowd was sitting about him, and they said to him, "Your mother and brothers are outside, asking for you". And he replied, "Who are my mother and brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and brothers". (Mk. 3:31—35.)*

Once, when his mother spoke to him, Jesus snapped at her, "O woman, what have you to do with me?" (Jn. 2:4). And yet, while he acted like this towards his own mother, he condemned the Pharisees for their supposed hypocrisy over the law requiring that parents be honored (Matt. 15:3—6; Mk. 7:10—13).

In some instances, it is difficult to accuse Jesus of failing to practice what he preached for the simple reason that he taught contradictory things. Christians are used to thinking of him as "gentle Jesus, meek and mild", because of his commands to "turn the other cheek" and to "not resist an evil". And indeed, Jesus seems to have acted like this sometimes. But at other times, he clearly saw his role as a violent one:

*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but the sword. I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies will be the members of his own household. (Matt. 10:34—36.)*

Certainly, he saw nothing wrong with using violence when he thought it necessary. When he saw the money changers in the Temple, he lost his temper and lashed out with violence:

*So he made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple areas: he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. (Jn. 2:15.)*

Before his arrest, Jesus was expecting trouble, so he told his disciples to prepare themselves by getting weapons:

*If you do not have a sword sell your cloak and buy one. (Lk. 22:36.)*

When he was arrested, there was a fight during which "one of Jesus's companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear" (Matt. 26:51). It is very difficult for Buddhists to reconcile such behavior with the idea of being perfect. To retaliate against one's accusers, to lose one's temper, and to encourage others to carry weapons and use them seem to negate the whole idea of moral perfection.

Christians have great difficulty understanding why Buddhists and other non-Christians cannot accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior as they themselves do. But when we read about Jesus and carefully examine, analyze, and dissect how he lived his life and what he taught, the reason for their rejection becomes obvious. The Jesus portrayed in the Gospels was not a kindly,

meek, and compliant Savior as Christians claim, but, rather, a crafty, unpredictable troublemaker. Jesus was tried as a common criminal and was sentenced and crucified by the Roman authorities — he is dead and is not coming back. ■

# 5

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## A Critique of the Bible

Christianity is a book-based religion. There is no evidence for the claims of Christianity other than what is written in the Bible, and this fact alone makes this book the foundation of Christian doctrine and faith. Today as in the past, Christians have picked through the Bible arguing with each other over the meaning of its phrases and words and have tried to convince non-Christians of the truth of a book that they themselves cannot agree about. But one thing which all Christians agree about is that the Bible is God's word — not merely that it contains God's word, but that it is God's word; an infallible and complete revelation given to man by God. We will examine this claim and see whether it has any truth to it.

### Is the Bible God's Word?

If the Bible really is God's word, it indicates that he is a very strange deity indeed. One would expect that the creator of the universe would only speak to humans when he had something of great importance to say and that what he said would be of universal significance. Not so. The book of Chronicles, for example, consists of little more than lists of names of people we know little or nothing about and who died thousands of years ago. There are no commandments, no ethical principles, no hints on how to live properly or how to worship God here — just page after page of useless names. Why would God waste his time revealing such things? And what about the Song of Solomon? This book consists of a collection of erotic love poetry. Once again, with the world in such a mess, one would have thought that God could have come up with something more important to say to humanity than this.

Then, we come to the Gospels, which recount the public ministry of Jesus. Why has God decided to reveal the ministry of Jesus, not once, but four times, and why has he revealed what are very clearly four different and contradictory versions of the same story? Indeed, there are still other versions as well, if we count the Gospels and other apocryphal works that were left out of the New Testament. Unlike most Christians, who are typically ill-informed about the history and fundamental doctrines of their own religion, scholars and historians have given perfectly plausible answers to these questions. The Bible is not a revelation from God, it is a compilation, a rather untidy compilation, written by many different people, over many centuries, changed and edited from time to time, and containing legends, stories, genealogies, fables, and sacred and secular writings. The Bible is no more a revelation from God than are the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Divine Comedy*, or the *Epic of Bēowulf*.

## Is the Bible Inspired?

Christians claim that, although the books of the Bible were actually written by different people, these people were inspired and guided by God as they wrote. While contemporary Christians make this claim, the ancient authors of the Bible never did. For example, Luke says at the beginning of his Gospel:

*Insomuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us... it seemed good to me also having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you... (Lk. 1:1—3.)*

There is nothing here about being filled with the spirit of God either before or after he wrote, he simply says that others had written accounts of the ministry of Jesus, so he thought it might be a good idea if he wrote something as well. If he really were inspired by God to write his Gospel, why did he not mention it? But, the claim of inspiration is not only unsubstantiated, it also raises a very serious problem. Christians are always claiming that God speaks to them in prayer, that he gives them advice, and that he tells them what to do. They claim that God's voice is very direct, very clear, and very real. But, if they really have no doubt that God is speaking to them, then surely his words should be recorded and included somewhere in the Bible. The Bible contains a record of what God allegedly said to Moses, Joshua, Matthew, Mark, Peter, and Paul, so why should what he supposedly says to modern-day Christians not be included in the Bible also? Christians will balk at such a suggestion, which indicates that they are not so convinced that the words they hear in their hearts really do come from God after all. More likely than not, it is just their own deluded minds playing tricks on them.

*No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means. — George Bernard Shaw*

## One Bible or Several?

In ancient times, there was no standardized version of the Old Testament. Different Jewish groups and different regions had their own versions. There were the Septuagint, Aquila of Sinope's version, Theodotion's version, and Symmachus's version, all containing different texts and different numbers of books. The Old Testament used by modern Christians is based on the Massoretic version, which only appeared after the Synod of Jamnia, held in Palestine at the end of the 1st century CE. The New Testament did not appear in its present form until the year 404 CE, nearly four hundred years after the death of Jesus. Before that time, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Nicodemus, the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Paul, and a dozen other books were all considered canonical. In 404 CE, these books were simply cut out of the New Testament because they contained ideas that were contrary to Christian theology at the time. If these books were considered to be revelation from God by early Christians, why do modern Christians not consider them to be so? One of the oldest existing copies of the Bible, the Codex Sinaiticus, includes the Epistle of Barnabas, a book that is not found in the modern Bible. For the Orthodox, the recognition of these books as authoritative was formalized in the Second Council of Trullan of 692 CE, although they were nearly universally accepted in the mid-300s.

The Catholic Church made dogmatic definition upon its Biblical Canon at the Council of Trent of 1546, and reaffirmed subsequently. For the Church of England, the canon was made dogmatic in the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1563; for Calvinism, in the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647. Even at the present day, the Coptic Bible (adopted by the Egyptian Church) includes the two Epistles of Clement, and the Ethiopian Bible includes books found nowhere else: the Sinodos (a collection of prayers and instructions supposedly written by Clement of Rome), the Octateuch (a book supposedly written by Peter to Clement of Rome), the Book of the Covenant (in two parts, the first details rules of church order, the second relates instructions from Jesus to the disciples given between the resurrection and the ascension), and the Didascalia (with more rules of church order, similar to the Apostolic Constitutions).

When we look at the Bibles used by modern Christians, we find that there are several different versions. The Bible used by the Ethiopian Church, one of the most ancient of all Christian churches, contains the Books of Enoch and the Shepherd of Hermas, which are not found in the Bibles used by Catholics and Protestants. The Bible used by the Catholic Church contains the books of Judith, Tobias (also known as Tobit), and Baruch, which have been cut out of the Bible used in Protestant churches. Although not found in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Baruch is found in the Septuagint and the Vulgate Bible, the Ethiopian Bible, and also in Theodotion's version. The book of Judith is found in the Septuagint but not in the Hebrew Bible. The book of Tobias is not found in the Hebrew Bible, but it is found in the Vulgate. Prof. H. L. Drummingwright of the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in his introduction to the Bible, explains how these books came to be removed from the Protestant Bible. These books were, he says, "in most Protestant Bibles until the 19th century, when publishers, led by the British and Foreign Bible Society voluntarily began to omit them". Once again, these books contained ideas that the churches did not like, so they censored them. How can a book like Judith be the infallible word of God one moment and not the next? Why are there so many different versions of God's supposed infallible word? And which of these different versions of God's words is the real one?

### **Are There Mistakes in the Bible?**

We have already seen that there are many mistakes in the Bible, but we will now take a look at three more examples of inaccuracies. Today, even schoolchildren know that the earth moves — in moves on its axis and, at the same time, it moves around the sun. We also know that the tectonic plates on the earth's surface move. The Bible, however, clearly states that the earth does not move. In 1 Chronicles 16:30, the Bible says, "The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved" (see also Ps. 93:1, 96:10, and 104:5). It was these very verses that the Catholic Church used to condemn Galileo (1564—1642) in the 16th century for saying that the earth moved around the sun.

Here and in many other places, the Bible contradicts scientific fact. But the Bible does not just contradict science, it contradicts itself. Let us have a look at the creation story. At the beginning of the Book of Genesis, we are told that God created all the plants and trees on the third day (Gen. 1:11—13), all birds, animals, and fish on the fifth day (Gen. 1:20—23), and finally, man and woman on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26—27). Yet a little further on in Genesis, there is a different version of the creation story, saying that God created man first (Gen. 2:7), then all plants and trees (Gen. 2:9), then all birds and animals (Gen 2:19), and only then did God

create woman (Gen. 2:21—22). These two versions of the creation story contradict each other. Now, let us look at the story of Noah's Ark. In one place in Genesis, we are told that Noah took two of every animal and put them in the ark (Gen. 6:19). But later in Genesis, we are told that Noah took seven pairs of all clean animals and birds and two pairs of all other creatures and put them in the ark (Gen. 7:2). Again, the Bible is contradicting itself. Christians will object to all this, saying that these and numerous other mistakes in the Bible are only small and of no significance. However, only one mistake is required to show that the Bible is not infallible. Furthermore, if mistakes can be made in small matters, they can also be made in important matters. One important contradiction concerns the three versions of the Ten Commandments. The first version is found in Ex. 20:1—17, and this is the version that is usually cited. Next, a similar version is found in Deut. 5:1—21. Finally, an entirely different version is found in Ex. 34:1—25. Mistakes such as these — and there are many others — are proof either that the Bible is not the word of God or that God is capable of making mistakes.

### **Is the Bible Reliable Testimony?**

We have seen that the Bible is not infallible and, therefore, cannot be taken as a genuine revelation. So, if it is not God's word, whose word is it? Many of the books of the Bible are named after the people who are supposed to have written them — in other words, human authors. Before the invention of the printing press, books were copied by hand. The Bible is full of copy errors — sometimes, these were simply due to carelessness. At other times, however, passages were deliberately edited, omitted, or inserted. And, finally, the Bible contains outright forgeries — for example, some of the epistles attributed to the Apostle Paul were not written by him.

Christians could claim that, even if the Bible is not necessarily an infallible revelation, it is the testimony of reliable people. However, for testimony to be reliable, it must come from reliable people, trustworthy people, people from good backgrounds and of good character. Were the direct disciples (the twelve Apostles) of Jesus such people? Let us look. Some of Jesus's disciples were tax collectors (Matt. 9:9), a dishonest and despised group with a well-earned reputation for corruption (Matt. 18:17). Others were mere illiterate fisherman (Mk. 1:16—17). Simon was a Zealot (Lk. 6:15) — the Zealots were a group of men known for their fanatical and often violent opposition to Roman rule and, like many people at the time, involved in illegal politics. Simon used an alias and was also known as Peter (Matt. 10:2). Peter and James were given the nicknames "Boanerges", meaning "sons of thunder" (Mk. 3:17), referring to their violent personalities. When Jesus was arrested, his disciples were carrying swords and were willing to use them (Matt. 26:51). Clearly, this was a gang of ruffians, of troublemakers. No wonder their leader was apprehended and crucified by the Roman authorities. After Jesus's death, leadership of these mischief-makers passed to Jesus's brother James, who, in turn, was stoned to death sometime around 63 CE. After James's death, leadership passed to Simeon, son of Clopas, a brother of Joseph. Simeon was crucified during the rule of the Roman Emperor Trajan by the Proconsul Tiberius Claudius Atticus Herodes in Jerusalem in either 107 or 117 CE. Corrupt tax collectors, criminals, misfits, malcontents, religious extremists, illiterate fools, and violent political activists — these are hardly the kinds of people around whom most of us would feel comfortable or whose testimony we would accept as trustworthy.

Another thing that should make us wary of trusting the testimony of Jesus's disciples is that they seemed to be constantly misunderstanding what Jesus was saying (Mk. 4:13, 6:52,



8:15—17, 9:32; Lk. 8:9, 9:45). Further, they are supposed to have seen Jesus perform amazing miracles, and yet despite this, they still had doubts about him. If even the people who were specifically chosen by Jesus to be his closest disciples and who knew, saw, and heard him did not believe, how could we, who have never seen nor heard him, be expected to believe? Jesus scolded his disciples and called them “men of little faith” (Matt. 8:26, 17:20). Should we trust the testimony of men who constantly failed to understand what was being said to them and whom even Jesus called “men of little faith”? How unreliable and dishonest the disciples were is best illustrated by what they did just prior to and during Jesus’s arrest. He asked them to keep watch, but they fell asleep (Matt. 26:36—43). After Jesus was arrested, they lied and denied that they even knew him (Mk. 14:66—72). And who betrayed Jesus in the first place? His disciple Judas Iscariot (Matt. 26:14—16). Association with sinners, liars, traitors, and fools in order to help them is not, in itself, blameworthy. But should we believe what such people say? Probably not.

An even more disturbing thing about Jesus’s disciples is just how many of them were said to be possessed by demons or devils from time to time. We are told that Mary Magdalene, who later claimed to have seen Jesus rise from the dead, had been possessed by seven devils (Mk. 16:9). Satan is said to have entered Judas (Lk. 22:3), tried to get into Simon (Lk. 22:31), and Jesus once actually called his chief disciple Peter “Satan” (Matt. 16:23), suggesting that Jesus thought that Peter, too, was possessed by a devil at the time. Whether possession by devils actually happens or whether it indicates serious psychological disorders as modern psychiatrists claim, either way, it indicates that we should treat the testimony of Jesus’s disciples with extreme caution.

### Who Did Write the Bible?

We have seen that the Bible is not infallible, that it cannot be a revelation, and that it is not the testimony of reliable, trustworthy people. We will now show that the Bible was not even written by the people who are supposed to have written it. Let us have a look at the first five books in the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books describe the creation of the world, God’s first revelation to humanity, and the early history of the people of Israel — these five books are supposed to have been written by Moses. They are, in fact, often called “The Books of Moses”. However, authorship by Moses is clearly impossible because, in these books, we have an account of Moses’s death:

*So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord, and they buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth Peor, but no man knows the place of his burial to this day. (Deut. 34:5—6.)*

How could a person write an account of his own death and burial? Thus, the book of Deuteronomy, at least, must have been written by someone other than Moses.

Now, let us look at the New Testament. Christians claim that the Gospel of Matthew was written by Matthew (a tax collector, a doubter, a “man of little faith”), one of the disciples of Jesus. Yet, it is easy to demonstrate that Matthew could not possibly have written the Gospel that bears his name. We read:

*As Jesus passed on from there he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office and said to him, "Follow me". And he rose and followed him. (Matt. 9:9.)*

Neither now nor in the past do people write about themselves in the third person. If Matthew had really written this, we would expect it to read:

*As Jesus passed on from there he saw me sitting at the tax office and said to me, "Follow me". And I rose and followed him.*

Obviously, this was not written by Matthew but by someone else. We do not know who this other person was, but Biblical scholars have made a guess. In the preface to his translation to the Gospel of Matthew, the distinguished Bible scholar John Bertram Phillips (1906—1982) says:

*Early tradition ascribes this Gospel to the apostle Matthew but scholars nowadays almost all reject this view. The author, who we still can conveniently call Matthew has plainly drawn on a collection of oral traditions. He has used Mark's Gospel freely, though he has rearranged the order of events, and has in several instances used different words for what is plainly the same story.*

This is a deeply disturbing admission, especially coming from an eminent Biblical scholar. We are told that "almost all" modern Biblical scholars reject the idea that the Gospel of Matthew was actually written by the Apostle Matthew. We are told that, although the real author is unknown, it is "convenient" to keep calling him "Matthew". Writing under a pseudonym — that is, attributing one's work to someone else — is called "forgery". Next, we are told that, whoever wrote the Gospel of Matthew has "freely" copied much of his material from the Gospel of Mark. In other words, part of the Gospel of Matthew is just plagiarism, where material has been "rearranged" and restated in "different words". So apparently in the Gospel of Matthew, not only do we not have the words of God, we do not even have the words of Matthew.

As it turns out, not a single one of the Gospels was written by the people after whom they are named. Most of the apostles were illiterate — they could neither read nor write. Hence, they could not have left written accounts. As already noted, another problem with the Gospels is that they contain all sorts of bizarre and contradictory views, which also points to dubious authorship. To their credit, Biblical scholars like Prof. Phillips openly admit these and other major doubts about the authorship of the Gospels, but such admissions make the claim that the Gospels were written by the disciples of Jesus completely untrue.

## **Mistakes and Variations in the Bible**

If we look at the bottom of the pages or between the columns in most Bibles, we will find many notes. These notes indicate mistakes, variations, or doubtful readings in the text of the Bible, and there are literally thousands of them. Some of the mistakes or variations consist only of a few words, but some of them are long passages (see, for example, the notes to Lk. 9:55—56; Jn. 5:3; Acts 24:6; 1 Cor. 8:36—38, 11:4—7; 2 Cor. 10:13—15). Also notice that the notes to Mark 16:9—20 mention that this long passage is not found in the oldest copies of the Gospel. In

other words, this long passage was added at a later time. How can Christians honestly claim that the Bible is infallible and without mistakes when all of the mistakes are listed at the bottom of each page?

In the New Testament, Jesus and his disciples often quote the Old Testament in order to make a point or, more usually, to attempt to prove that the Old Testament prophesizes events in the life of Jesus. But when we compare these quotes with the original text of the Old Testament, we find that they are almost always different. Here, we will use the New International Version of the Bible.

Old Testament:

*But you, Bethlehem Ephastah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old.*  
(Mic. 5:2.)

New Testament:

*But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.*  
(Matt. 2:6.)

This quotation from the Old Testament in the New Testament contains not just different wording, it also changes the meaning of the original. Has Matthew misquoted the Old Testament because he was not familiar with it and made a mistake? Has he deliberately misquoted in order to alter the meaning? Or was the Old Testament Matthew used different from the one we have today? The New Testament quotes the Old Testament dozens of times, and hardly a single quote is accurate. Christians will protest and say that these changes are only minor and of no importance. Perhaps so, but once again, these discrepancies are proof that the Bible does, in fact, contain mistakes, contrary to what Christians say. Furthermore, if it is true, as Christians claim, that the authors of the New Testament were inspired by God as they wrote, it is very strange that they could not even quote the Old Testament accurately.

### **Removing Verses from the Bible**

Just before his death, Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer, and since that time, generations of Christians have learned this prayer by heart. But anyone who memorized it twenty or more years ago will have to learn it anew because the Lord's Prayer has changed. We will now compare the version of the Lord's Prayer found in the King James translation of the Bible with the version of the Lord's Prayer found in the New International Version translation:

King James translation:

First, the Lord's prayer is given as follows in the Gospel of Matthew (quoted from the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer* [1662]):

*Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9—13.)*

A slightly different version is found in the Gospel of Luke:

*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. (Lk. 11:2—4.)*

New International Version translation:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matt. 6:9—13.)*

*Father, hallowed is your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation. (Lk. 11:2—4.)*

Notice not only that parts have been removed in the New International Version but also that the meaning has been changed. The next time that a Christian tries to evangelize you, ask him or her why parts have been removed from this most famous and important of Jesus's teachings. Ask them which of the two different versions of the Lord's Prayer is the infallible, unchanging word of God and which translation is the most accurate. Ask them who had knowledge and wisdom enough to tamper with the Bible. Do not let them try to change the subject. Insist on an answer. You will find that they have great difficulties answering these questions. Here as elsewhere, the reader is encouraged to go to any library or bookshop, find different translations of the Bible, and carefully compare them. You will see with your own eyes how much the Bibles differ as a result of tampering, censoring, and careless mistakes.

Finally, there is the famous and extremely controversial case of the missing passages from the Gospel of Mark found by the Biblical scholar Morton Smith in a letter written by the Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens [150—215 CE]). According to Smith, these passages indicate that Jesus was a magician who engaged in sex with the men he baptized. Thus, it turns out that the young man clothed with just a linen cloth to cover his naked body in the Garden of Gethsemane may have been a male lover. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus out of jealousy, taking the authorities to the place where Jesus was with the young man, who put up a bit of a fight, was seized, but was able to escape, losing his linen cloth in the process (Mk. 14:51—52). If these missing passages from the Gospel of Mark are genuine and if Smith's interpretation is correct, it is small wonder that they were removed. The implications for modern Christians are clear: those who persecute homosexuals are persecuting Jesus.

Proof that the Bible has been tampered with can be found on nearly every page if one looks carefully enough. The text of the Bible is arranged into chapters, which, in turn, are divided into verses. As you read, you will sometimes notice that one or two verses have mysteriously disappeared. For example, notice that verses 44 and 46 have been deleted from Chapter 9 of the Gospel of Mark, as has verse 28 from Chapter 15 of the same Gospel. Notice also that verse 37 has been removed from Chapter 8 of Acts. How can Christians honestly claim that the Bible is the infallible and unchanging word of God when they have removed inconvenient, embarrassing, or problematic verses and words?

We know from history that, during the first two centuries of the Christian era, forged Gospels, fake sayings of Jesus, and spurious epistles were very common. People cut bits out of the Bible or added bits to it according to what they thought it should say. In one place in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul warned his readers that someone was forging letters claiming to be written by him (2 Thess. 2:2). In another place, there are dire threats against anyone tampering with the text of the Bible (Rev. 22:18—19). We know for a fact that the first eleven verses of the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John were added later, because they are not found in the earliest copies of the Gospel, and they are not quoted by any early Christian writers. With so much forging and faking, chopping and changing, it is impossible to know who really wrote the Bible and what Jesus really said.

### Selective Interpreting

Whenever Christians want to convince us of the truth of their religion, they will quote from the Bible, believing as they do that every word of it is literally true. But when non-Christians quote from the Bible to show that some aspects of their religion are silly or illogical (for example, that smoke comes out of God's nose and fire comes out of his mouth [Ps. 18:7—8]; or that donkeys can talk [Num. 22:28]), they will say: "That is symbolic; it is not meant to be taken literally". Christians are very selective in how they interpret the Bible. They claim that some passages are God's words and literally true, while other parts — usually the embarrassing parts — are not meant to be taken literally. When Thomas Jefferson (1743—1826) started removing the embarrassing parts, there was almost nothing left.

*Christianity is the most perverted system that ever shone on man.* — Thomas Jefferson

Either the Bible is God's infallible word or it is not — one cannot pick and choose. And if, indeed, some passages are meant to be taken literally and others are not, how do Christians decide which is which? If the stories about Balaam's donkey talking, Adam and Even eating the apple, or Moses turning his stick into a snake are not meant to be taken literally, then perhaps, the stories of his virgin birth, the miracles Jesus is alleged to have performed, and his resurrection are only symbolic and not meant to be taken literally. ■



# 6

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## Buddhism — The Logical Alternative

*Take refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and, with full insight, you will grasp the Four Noble Truths: suffering; the cause of suffering; the end of suffering; and the Noble Eightfold Path that takes you beyond suffering. (Dhammapada, verses 190—191.)*

### The Teachings of the Buddha

Christianity is based exclusively upon certain supposed historical events (the virgin birth, the resurrection, etc.), the only record of which is an allegedly reliable book called the “Bible”. If these events can be shown to have never occurred or if the documents recording these events can be shown to be unreliable, then Christianity will collapse. In this book, we have shown that Christian claims are at best highly doubtful and at worst demonstrably false. When we examine the teachings of the Buddha, we find an entirely different situation. Even if we were able to prove that the Buddha never existed or that there are mistakes in the Buddhist scriptures, this would not necessarily undermine Buddhism. Why is this? Because Buddhism is not primarily about the historical Buddha or about events which happened in the distant past; rather, it is about human suffering, what causes that suffering, and how that suffering can be overcome so that we can live happy, productive, worry-free, and meaningful lives. If we wish to understand or verify Buddhism, we do not have to flick through scriptures squabbling about the meaning of various words or phrases. Instead, we become sensitive to our own experience. Let us examine the principles that are the doctrinal basis of Buddhism.

### When We Die, We Are Reborn

According to Christianity, people are born once at a particular point in time, live their lives, and when they die have only one of two possible destinies — Heaven or Hell. Christians believe that these destinies are eternal and that people go to their particular destinies as a result of God’s judgment. Buddhism teaches that, when people die, they can have any one of a number of different destinies. Buddhism teaches that none of these destinies is eternal and that, having finished one’s life span in one of these destinies, one will die and then pass to another destiny — that is, one is “reborn”. This round of rebirths is known as “cyclic existence” (*saṃsāra*) — it has no beginning, but it can be brought to an end. Buddhism further teaches that one’s destiny is conditioned by one’s deeds (*karma* [*kamma*]), that is, the sum total of the good or the bad that

one has done during one's life. This means that all good people, no matter what their religion, will have a favorable destiny. It also means that even those who have done evil will have a chance to do good in some future life. As can be clearly seen, this means that we ourselves forge our destinies.

Christians scoff at the idea of rebirth and say that there is no evidence that such a thing happens. Well, as for evidence, there is certainly no evidence to support the Christian afterlife theory, while there is at least some evidence that people can be reborn (see, for example, Dr. Ian Stevenson's book *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* [1974]; Martin Wilson's book *Rebirth and the Western Buddhist* [2nd edition, 1987]; or Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's book *The Truth of Rebirth and Why It Matters for Buddhist Practice* [2012]).

## **Life is Suffering**

The next fundamental principle of Buddhism is the idea that ordinary existence is, by its very nature, suffering (*dukkha*). Although Christians accuse Buddhists of being pessimistic for saying this, life's inherent unsatisfactoriness is confirmed by the Bible: "In the world you will have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33); "Man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7); "All things are full of weariness" (Ecc. 1:8); "the earth mourns and withers; the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth" (Is. 24:4). But while the Bible agrees with the Buddha on this matter, the two disagree on why suffering exists.

## **Suffering Has a Cause**

Christianity relies on what is plainly a myth to explain the origin of evil and suffering, claiming that they are due to Adam and Eve disobeying God (Gen. 3:1—24). Buddhism sees suffering as a psychological phenomenon with a psychological cause — *taṇhā*, that is, "wanting, craving, desire". And our experience tells us that this is so. When we want something and cannot get it, we feel frustration, and the stronger the wanting, the stronger the frustration. Even if we get what we want, we soon grow tired of it and begin to want something else. Even physical suffering is caused by craving because the strong craving to live causes us to be reborn, and when we are reborn, we become subject to sickness, accidents, old age, death, etc.

## **Suffering Can Be Overcome**

The third fundamental principle of Buddhism is the idea that it is possible to be free from suffering. When craving, wanting, and desire cease, one's life becomes more content and happy, and, at death, one is no longer reborn. This state of complete freedom from suffering is called "*nirvāṇa*" ("*nibbāna*") and is described by the Buddha as being "the highest happiness":

*No disease is worse than hunger, no suffering is worse than attachment to compound things. Those who are wise, knowing these things as they really are, realize nibbāna, the highest happiness. (Dhammapada, verse 203.)*



Christians often mistakenly think that *nirvāṇa* is blank nothingness and accuse Buddhism of being nihilistic. No doubt, this misunderstanding arises because of their inability to conceive of an afterlife more subtle than their naïve Heaven — a place “up there” (Ps. 14:2, 53:2) with doors and windows (Gen. 28:17; Rev. 4:1, 4:2; 2 Kg. 7:2; Mal. 3:10), where God sits on a throne (Rev. 4:2) surrounded by angels in beautiful gowns with crowns on their heads and playing trumpets (Rev. 4:4). The Buddha categorically said that *nirvāṇa* was not nihilistic:

*When one has freed the mind, the gods cannot trace him, even though they think: “This is the consciousness attached to the Enlightened One [the Buddha].” And why? It is because the Enlightened One is untraceable. Although I say this, there are some recluses and religious teachers who misrepresent me falsely, contrary to fact, saying: “The Monk Gotama [the Buddha] is a nihilist because he teaches the cutting off, the destruction, the disappearance of the existing entity”. But this is exactly what I do not say. Both now and in the past, I simply teach suffering and the overcoming of suffering. (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 22.)*

But the Buddha also said that *nirvāṇa* is not the crude “eternal life” like the one described by Christianity. It is an utterly pure and blissful state, which cannot adequately be described by conventional language. Technically, *nirvāṇa* means “blowing out, destruction, elimination, extinction”. But of what? It is the “blowing out, destruction, elimination, extinction” of *dukkha*, of suffering: “Both now and in the past, I simply teach suffering and the overcoming of suffering”.

Christians sometimes complain that Buddhism contradicts itself because, in wanting to attain *nirvāṇa*, one is seemingly strengthening the very thing (namely, *taṇhā*, “wanting, craving, desire”) which prevents one from attaining it. This point was raised at the time of the Buddha and answered by one of His chief disciples, Ānanda:

*The Brahmin Uṇṇābha asked Venerable Ānanda: “What is the aim of living the holy life under the Monk Gotama?” — “It is for the sake of abandoning desire”. — “Is there a way, a practice by which to abandon this desire”? — “There is a way — it is by means of the powers of desire, energy, thought, and consideration together with concentration and effort”. — “If this is so, Venerable Ānanda, then it is a task without end. Because to get rid of one desire by means of another is impossible.” — “Then I will ask you a question; answer as you like. Before, did you have the desire, the energy, the thought, and the consideration to come to this park? And having arrived, did not that desire, that energy, that thought, that consideration cease?” — “Yes, it did”. — “Well, for one who has destroyed the defilements, once he has gained enlightenment, that desire, that energy, that thought, that consideration he had for enlightenment has now ceased”. (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Book Seven, Sutta no. 15.)*

## **There Is a Way to Overcome Suffering**

The last of the four fundamental principles of Buddhism tells us how to eliminate craving so that we can become free from suffering both in this life and in the future. The first principle describes how a Buddhist sees the world and the human predicament. The second principle tells

us that this predicament has a cause. The third principle tells us that the cause can be eliminated. The last principle delineates the way or means to eliminate the cause, which involves a system of training composed of eight steps — the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Let us look briefly at each of these steps:

1. Right Understanding: If we persist in believing that evil and suffering are due to something that Adam and Eve once did or that they are caused by devils, we will never be able to overcome them. When we come to understand that we inflict suffering (*dukkha*) upon ourselves through our ignorance (*avijjā*) and craving (*taṇhā*), we have taken the first step in overcoming that suffering. Knowing the true cause of the problem is the beginning of solving it. And it is not sufficient to just believe — we must understand. Understanding requires intelligence, careful observation, evaluating the facts, and openness.
2. Right Thought: Christians often try to give the impression that theirs is the only system of ethics which revolves around gentleness, love, and forgiveness. The truth, however, is that 500 years before the birth of Jesus, the Buddha taught a love-centered system of ethics superior to and more complete than that of Christianity. To practice Right Thought, we must fill our minds with thoughts of love and compassion:

*Develop a mind full of love, be compassionate and restrained by virtue, arouse your energy, be resolute and always firm in making progress. (Theragāthā, 979.)*

*When with a mind full of love one feels compassion for the whole world — above, below, and across, unlimited everywhere, filled with infinite kindness, complete and well-developed —, any limited actions one may have done do not remain lingering in one's mind. (Jātaka, 37—38.)*

*Just as water cools both good and bad and washes away all dirt and dust, in the same way, you should develop thoughts of love to friend and foe alike, and having reached perfection, you will attain enlightenment. (Jātaka Nidānakathā, 168—169.)*

3. Right Speech: In practicing Right Speech, we should speak only in ways which promote honesty, kindness, and peace, avoiding false speech, vulgar speech, sarcasm, gossip, and idle chatter. The Buddha described Right Speech as follows:

*Giving up lying, one becomes a speaker of the truth — reliable, trustworthy, dependable, not a deceiver of the world. Giving up slander, one does not repeat there what is heard here or repeat here what is heard there for the purpose of causing divisions among people. Thus, one is a reconciler of those who are divided and a combiner of those already united, rejoicing in peace, delighting in peace, promoting peace — peace is the motive of his speech. Giving up harsh speech, one speaks what is blameless, pleasant to the ear, agreeable, going to the heart, urbane, pleasing, and liked by all. Giving up useless chatter, one speaks at the right time, about the facts, to the point, about Dhamma and discipline, words worthy of being treasured, seasonable, reasoned, clearly defined, and connected to the goal. (Dīgha Nikāya, Sutta no. 1.)*

4. Right Action: Right Action requires that we avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct (rape, adultery, and seduction), and indulging in intoxicating drinks and drugs causing heedlessness and practice gentleness, generosity, self-control, and helpfulness towards others.
5. Right Livelihood: To practice Right Livelihood, one will only choose a vocation which is ethically wholesome and which does not produce anything that does harm to oneself, to others, to society in general, or to the environment. An employer will pay his workers fairly, treat them with respect, and make sure that their working conditions are safe. An employee, on the other hand, will work honestly and diligently (see *Dīgha Nikāya*, Sutta no. 31). One should also use one's income responsibly — providing for one's needs, saving some, and giving some to charity.
6. Right Effort: Christian beliefs about God and man make human effort inconsequential, for, according to Christianity, humans are by nature depraved and evil sinners:

*How can man be righteous before God? How can he who is born of woman be clean?*  
(Job 24:4.)

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt.* (Jer. 17:9.)

Being nothing more than maggots (Job 25:6), the Bible tells us that humans are incapable of being good and cannot be saved through their own efforts but only by the grace of God. In contrast, Buddhism sees human nature as fundamentally good and, given the right conditions, humans are more likely to do good than evil (*Milindapañha*, 84). In Christianity, humans are held responsible not only for the evil they have done throughout their lives, but they are also held responsible and likely to be punished for the sins of Adam and Eve. In Buddhism, people take responsibility only for their own actions and, inasmuch as human nature assumed to be basically good, this means that effort, exertion, and diligence are of great importance. The Buddha says:

*Abandon that which is unwholesome. It can be done. If it were not possible to do, I would not urge you to do it. But since it can be done, I say to you: Abandon that which is unwholesome. If abandoning that which is unwholesome brought loss and sorrow, I would not urge you to do so. But since it leads to benefit and happiness, I urge you: Abandon that which is unwholesome. Cultivate that which is wholesome. It can be done. If it were not possible to do, I would not urge you to do so. But since it can be done, I say to you: Cultivate that which is wholesome. If cultivating that which is wholesome brought loss and sorrow, I would not urge you to do so. But since it leads to benefit and happiness, I urge you: Cultivate that which is wholesome.* (*Āṅguttara Nikāya*, Book of Twos, Sutta no. 19.)

Specifically, Right Effort is the effort we make to put forth the energy, to prod the mind, and to struggle:

- a. To prevent unarisen unwholesome mental states from arising;
- b. To abandon unwholesome mental states that have already arisen;

- c. To develop wholesome mental states that have not yet arisen;
- d. To maintain and perfect wholesome mental states that have already arisen.

In other words, it is the fourfold effort that we make to overcome and avoid fresh bad actions by body, speech, and mind; and the effort that we make in developing fresh actions of righteousness, inner peace, and wisdom, and in cultivating them to perfection.

7. Right Mindfulness: The last two steps on the Noble Eightfold Path jointly refer to meditation, the conscious and gentle practice of first coming to know the mind, then controlling it, and finally transforming it. Although the term “meditation” occurs about twenty times in the Bible, it refers there only to the simple practice of ruminating over passages from the scriptures (Josh. 1:8). The Bible seems to be completely unaware of the sophisticated meditation techniques found, for instance, in Buddhism. Consequently, when Christians are plagued by evil desires or troubled by stubborn negative thoughts, about all they can do is pray harder — praying is not a transformative methodology. The absence of sophisticated meditation techniques in Christianity is also the reason why Christians so often appear agitated and lacking in that quiet dignity characteristic of Buddhists. The Bible says, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10), but Christians cannot seem to sit still, let alone still their minds, even for a moment. The Bible also says: “Commune with your own heart on your beds and be still” (Ps. 4:4), which is exactly what Buddhists do when they meditate. But evangelical and born-again Christian prayer meetings often seem to resemble rock concerts in a lunatic asylum, with the pastor shouting and wildly gesticulating, while the people in the congregation sway back and forth, “speak in tongues”, writhe, weep, and clap their hands. There are even Christian denominations that handle snakes as part of their worship services — sometimes with dire consequences. Besides, Christians are usually too busy running around trying to convert others to find time to sit still and look into their hearts.

All of this is the exact opposite of what Buddhists do. For Buddhists, it is important to be aware of what is happening in the present moment. This is accomplished through developing Right Mindfulness, or alertness of mind. As a meditation practice, Right Mindfulness consists of abiding self-possessed and attentive, contemplating according to reality, the body, feelings, the state of the mind, and the contents of the mind, seeing all as composite, ever-becoming, impermanent, and subject to decay. It is maintaining ever-ready mental clarity no matter what we are doing, speaking, or thinking and in keeping before our mind the realities of existence, that is, the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and egolessness of all forms of existence.

8. Right Concentration: The great advantage of Buddhism is that it not only advises us to be calm, peaceful, free from unruly desires, and self-aware, but it also shows us how to develop these states. This is accomplished through the practice of meditation. There are meditations to induce calm, to eliminate negative mental states, to develop positive mental states, and to change attitudes. And of course, when the mind is free from prejudices, preconceived ideas, and distorting passions, it is more likely to see things as they really are. It is not surprising that many of the meditation techniques taught by the Buddha are now being used by psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, and counselors. ■

# 7

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## How to Answer Christians

Christians often ask Buddhists misleading questions with the intention of confusing, manipulating, or discouraging them. Christians see this tactic as the first step in destroying the confidence Buddhists have in Buddhism and in converting them to Christianity. In this chapter, we will look at some of these questions and comments and give effective Buddhist responses to them.

1. You do not believe in God, so you cannot explain how the world began.

Christianity does indeed have a creation story explaining how everything began, but is this explanation true? Let us examine it. The first book in the Bible — Book of Genesis — says that God created everything in six days and that, on the seventh day, he rested. This quaint old story is nothing but a myth and is no more true than the Hindu myth that the gods created everything by churning a sea of milk or the classical belief that the universe hatched out of a cosmic egg. Some parts of the creation myth are plainly absurd. For example, the Bible says that, on the first day, God created the heavens and the earth and then light and darkness, but only on the fourth day did he create the sun (Gen. 1:15—16). How can there be day and night, light and darkness on earth without the sun? This creation myth also contradicts modern science, which has credibly explained how the universe began and how life evolved. There are no departments of astronomy or biology in any of the world's leading universities which teach the Christian creation myth for the simple reason that it is not based on fact. So while it is true that Christianity has an explanation for how everything began, it is nothing more than a quaint old myth, without any basis in fact.

What then does Buddhism say about how everything began? Buddhism has little to say on this subject for a very good reason. The aim of Buddhism is to develop wisdom and compassion and thereby attain *nirvāṇa* — the end of suffering. Knowing how the universe began contributes nothing to this goal. Once, a Monk named Mālunkyāputta demanded that the Buddha (the *Tathāgata*) tell him, among other things, how the universe began:

*“Lord, while I was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in my mind: ‘These theories have not been elucidated, have been set aside, and have been rejected by the Exalted One ... If He does not explain these to me, then, I will abandon the Holy Life and return to the life of a lay person.’ If the Blessed One knows whether the world is eternal or not eternal; whether the world is finite or infinite; whether the life-principle is the same as the body or whether the life-principle is one thing and the body is another;*

*whether the Tathāgata exists or does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death — in that case, let the Blessed One explain these to me*

*“If the Blessed One does not know whether the world is eternal or not eternal; whether the world is finite or infinite; whether the life-principle is the same as the body or whether the life-principle is one thing and the body is another; whether the Tathāgata exists or does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death — in that case, certainly, for one who does not know and lacks the insight, the only proper thing is to say: ‘I do not know, I do not have the insight’.”*

The Buddha advised him not to waste his time and energy on such speculation, which was detrimental to moral progress:

*“Now then, Mālunḱyāputta, did I ever say to you: ‘Come, Mālunḱyāputta, lead the Holy Life under me, and I will declare to you whether the world is eternal or not eternal; whether the world is finite or infinite; whether the life-principle is the same as the body or the life-principle is one thing and the body is another; whether the Tathāgata exists or does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata both exists and does not exist after death; whether the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist after death?’”*

*“No, Venerable Sir.”*

*“Did you ever say to me: ‘I will lead the Holy Life under the Blessed One if the Blessed One will declare to me whether this world is eternal or not eternal ... or whether, after death, the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist?’”*

*“No, Venerable Sir.”*

*“That being so, misguided man, who are you, and what are you abandoning?”*

*“If anyone should say thus: ‘I will not lead the Holy Life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me whether this world is eternal or not eternal ... or whether, after death, the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,’ that would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata, and, meanwhile, that person would die.*

*“It is as if, Mālunḱyāputta, a person were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison and his friends and companions, his kinsman and relatives brought a doctor to treat him and he should say to the doctor: ‘I shall not allow this arrow to be extracted until I know the name and caste of the man who wounded me; ... until I know whether the man who wounded me was tall or short or of medium height; ... until I know whether the man who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned; ... until I know whether the man who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city; ... until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow or a crossbow; ... until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fiber or reed or sinew or hemp or bark; ... until I know whether the shaft that wounded me was wild or cultivated; ... until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted — whether those of a vulture or a crow or a hawk or a peacock or a stork; ... until I know with what kind of sinew the shaft that wounded me was bound — whether that of an ox or a buffalo or a lion or a monkey; ... until I know what kind of arrow it was that wounded me — whether it was hoof-tipped or*

*curved or barbed or calf-toothed or oleander.’ That person would die before this would ever be known by him. In the same way, Mālunkyāputta, if anyone should say thus: ‘I will not lead the Holy Life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me whether this world is eternal or not eternal ... or whether, after death, the Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,’ that person would die before these questions had ever been elucidated by the Tathāgata.” (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta no. 63.)*

Buddhism concentrates on helping us solve the practical problems of life — it does not encourage us to waste our time on useless speculation that is irrelevant to our goal. And if a Buddhist did want to know how and when the universe began, he or she would ask a scientist.

*Of course, like every other man of intelligence and education, I do believe in organic evolution. It surprises me that at this late date such questions should be raised.*

— Woodrow Wilson

## 2. Buddhism is impractical because it says that you cannot even kill an ant.

Before we defend against the charge of being impractical, let us see if Christianity is practical. According to Jesus, if someone slaps us on the cheek, we should turn the other cheek and let them slap us there also (Matt. 5:25). If we discover that someone has stolen our pants, we should go out and give the thief our shirt as well (Matt. 5:40). This approach is not only impractical, it is problematic in that it only encourages people who have done wrong to keep doing wrong, not to change their behavior. In psychology, this is called “enabling”. We must not allow people to do wrong to us. Whenever someone does something wrong, he harms others at the same time that he harms himself. If he is not challenged, he will not grow. Therefore, we must use all of our strength to stop him, but with only good will, compassion, and sympathy for that person. If we act with hatred or anger, then we only aggravate the situation. But we cannot have good will for such a person unless our mind is calm and peaceful. So, we must practice to develop composure within ourselves, and then we can address the problem. Furthermore, the Buddha advised that problems should be addressed when they occur: “Where a difficulty arises, it should be settled right there”.

Now, let us return to the charge that Buddhism is impractical. The Buddha asked us to have respect for all life, even for such lowly creatures as worms and insects. In practical terms, when we take the Precept not to kill and try to put it into practice, we strive to develop impartiality, patience, self-control, humility, loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathy. So, in asking us to have respect for all life, Buddhism is far more practical than Christianity, and it is certainly more compassionate.

## 3. The Buddha is dead, so He cannot help you.

Buddhists sometimes have difficulty responding effectively when Christians say this to them. However, if we know *Dhamma* well, it is quite easy to refute this because, like most Christian claims about Buddhism, it is based upon misunderstandings.

It is simply not true to say that the Buddha cannot help us. During His forty-year career, the Buddha explained in great detail and with masterful clarity everything we need to

attain *nirvāṇa*. And crucially, His instructions have been carefully preserved by generations of scholar Monks — all we need to do is follow those instructions. The Buddha's words are as helpful and valid today as when He first spoke them.

Thus, when Christians say that the Buddha is dead, so He cannot help us, they are completely mistaken. But, behind this statement lie two key assumptions: (1) that Jesus is alive and (2) that he can help us. Let us look at these two assumptions. Christians claim that Jesus is alive, but what evidence is there for this? They will say that the Bible proves that Jesus rose from the dead. Unfortunately, farfetched claims made by superstitious people two thousand years ago do not prove anything. We cannot uncritically accept claims made in the Bible any more than we can uncritically accept unsubstantiated claims made in other sacred books. When we examine the Bible's claims about Jesus's supposed resurrection, we find very good reasons why we should not believe them. In fact, the Bible actually proves that Jesus is not alive. Just before he was crucified, he told his disciples that he would return before the last of them had died (Matt. 10:23, 16:28; Lk. 21:32). That was two thousand years ago, and Jesus has still not returned. Why? Obviously, because he is dead.

The second assumption is that Jesus responds when we pray to him. It is very easy to prove that this is not true. Christians die from terrible diseases, suffer misfortunes, have emotional problems, give into temptations, etc. just as non-Christians do, and these things happen despite the fact that Christians pray to Jesus for help. If Jesus were really alive and ready to help, why do Christians have just as many problems as non-Christians do? The answer is, once again, obviously, because he is dead and unable to help. There is even evidence in the Bible that Jesus cannot help people. Once, Jesus supposedly appeared to the Apostle Paul and promised that he would protect him from both Jews and Gentiles:

*I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people [the Jews] and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them... (Acts 26:16—17.)*

However, we know that Paul was eventually executed in Italy by the Roman authorities. Why did Jesus not protect Paul despite his promise to do so? Obviously, because he is dead and unable to help.

In response to this objection, Christians will say that there are people who can testify that their prayers have been answered. If this is true, it is also true that there are Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Jews, among others, who can say the same thing.

#### 4. Buddhists worship man-made idols.

This is, of course, an old slander that Christians have always flung at Buddhism and several other religions. Buddhists do not worship idols — they use the Buddha image as a reminder of their beloved Teacher and as an object on which to focus attention. But, while Christians are quick to accuse other religions of idolatry, many of them are guilty of idolatry themselves — the idolatry of the Bible. Is this not what is being done when pastors hold the Bible in the air as they shout out their sermons? They accuse others of worshiping man-made idols, while they worship a man-made book, filled with dry, dusty old words, which they quibble over, argue about, and quote in every situation.



5. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism is so pessimistic.

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the word “pessimism” means: (1) “A tendency to stress the negative or unfavorable or to take the gloomiest possible view”; (2) “The doctrine or belief that this is the worst of all possible worlds and that all things ultimately tend toward evil”; (3) “The doctrine or belief that the evil in the world outweighs the good” [from Latin *pessimus* ‘worst’]. It is interesting that Christians accuse Buddhism of being pessimistic, when the idea that evil is more pervasive than good is one of the central doctrines of Christianity. Two favorite Christian quotes from the Bible are, “All have sinned, all have fallen short of God’s glory” (Rom. 3:10) and “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Ecc. 7:20). According to the doctrine of Original Sin, all human beings are born sinners, incapable of freeing themselves from sin, and the evil in us is stronger than the good (Rom. 7:14–24). Christians will say that, while this is true, we can be free from sin if we accept Jesus. Regardless of whether there is any truth behind this claim or not, it is still the case that Christians feel that they need Jesus because their view of human nature as inherently sinful is so utterly negative and pessimistic.

*[Monotheism is] the great unmentionable evil at the center of our culture... I regard monotheism as the greatest disaster ever to befall the human race... From a barbaric Bronze Age text known as the Old Testament, three anti-human religions have evolved — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. — Gore Vidal*

Buddhism, on the other hand, has a very different and, needless to say, more realistic view of human nature. While fully recognizing humanity’s potential for evil, Buddhism teaches that we can conquer evil and develop good through our own efforts:

*Abandon evil! One can abandon evil! If it were impossible to abandon evil, I would not ask you to do so. But it can be done; therefore, I say, Abandon evil! Cultivate the good! One can cultivate what is good! If it were impossible to cultivate the good, I would not ask you to do so. But it can be done; therefore, I say, Cultivate the good! (Aṅguttara Nikāya, Book of Ones.)*

*Avoid all evil, cultivate the good, purify your mind: this sums up the teaching of the Buddhas. (Dhammapada, verse 183.)*

Whether one agrees with this belief or not, one can hardly say that it is pessimistic.

6. Jesus teaches us to love, but Buddhism encourages us to be cold and detached.

Once again, this is just not true. The Buddha teaches that we should develop a warm, caring love towards all living beings:

*Just as a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, even so one should cultivate unconditional love to all beings. (Sutta Nipāta, Urugavagga, Mettā Sutta [Discourse on Loving-Kindness], verse 149.)*

In every sense, love is at least as important in Buddhism as it is in Christianity, and it is emphasized even more so. There is, however, something which somewhat spoils the practice of love by Christians. Their loud insistence that only they love, that the quality of their love is superior to that of others, and their disparagement of and scoffing at the efforts of others to practice love, makes them appear thoroughly nauseating. Some Christians are so petty and jealous that they cannot acknowledge or appreciate a quality as beautiful as love when it is displayed by non-Christians.

*The problem with born-again Christians is that they are an even bigger pain the second time around.* — Herb Caen

7. Christianity is mainly a religion of love. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that men may not die but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16).

At first sight, this might appear to be a lovely saying, but to a thinking person, it only highlights the limitations and inadequacy of God’s love. Why did God not love the world so much that he simply forgave mankind for its supposed sins? Then, everyone could have been saved, and it would not have been necessary for Jesus to come to earth and be tortured and crucified. Indeed, the whole story of Jesus’s death reeks of wanton and unnecessary cruelty — the exact opposite of what we would expect from a loving and caring “Father in Heaven”. Why does God not love the world so much that he eliminates disease, misfortune, and poverty and allows humanity to live in peace and happiness? Why does God not love the world so much that he stops natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanos, tornados, and hurricanes/cyclones/typhoons or at least warns people that they are going to happen? We are told that sinners and non-believers go to Hell for eternity. Why does God not love the world so much that he forgives sinners and non-believers and then lets them enter Heaven? Clearly, God’s ability to forgive is defective. If God’s ability to forgive is defective, then his ability to love must be defective too.

*The cross is the symbol of torture.* — Ayn Rand

8. Buddhists claim that, when we die, we are reborn, but there is no proof of this.

Before responding to this claim, let us examine both the Christian and the Buddhist after-life theories. According to Christianity, we are born once, live our lives, and then die. After death, our soul will go either to eternal Heaven (if we accepted Jesus Christ as our lord and savior) or to eternal Hell (if we did not).

According to Buddhism, it is impossible to comprehend the ultimate beginning of existence. Each being is born, lives its life, dies, and then is born again into a new existence. This cycle of rebirths is a natural process which will go on forever unless the being attains *nirvāṇa*. Attaining *nirvāṇa* alters the process that causes rebirth and brings that process to an end for that individual being. In other words, each being’s existence is beginningless and endless unless *nirvāṇa* is attained, and, until that time, existence has no other purpose than to exist. To be more precise, it is an ever-changing stream of karmic energy that manifests (is reborn) as different beings existence after existence after existence, forever. This process of endless change exemplifies the ephemeral nature of existence — all things are conditioned,

impermanent, and subject to dissolution and disappearance. This is one of the key teachings of the Buddha:

*All life and all existence here and now,  
With all its joy and all its pain,  
Depend all on a state of mind,  
And that moment quickly passes by.*

*The aggregate entities that have passed away,  
At death as well as during life,  
Have all alike become extinguished,  
And they will never arise again.*

*Out of the unseen did they arise,  
Into the unseen do they pass.  
Just as lightning flashes for but an instant,  
So do they flash and pass away.*

Life, which, according to Buddhism, is ubiquitous throughout the universe, is a consequence of physical laws and is not something random. Life is the mediator of consciousness. Consciousness, in turn, is the means by which the universe experiences itself. Accordingly, consciousness is a fundamental constituent of reality — life is not its source, nor is it an epiphenomenon of matter.

Now, there are several logical and moral problems with the Christian theory which are absent from the Buddhist theory and which make the latter more acceptable. Christianity sees existence as having a beginning but no end, whereas Buddhism sees it as cyclic. There are no examples of processes in nature which have a beginning but no end. Rather, all the processes we observe in nature are cyclic. The Buddhist theory of rebirth is in harmony with the cyclic processes we find throughout nature, whereas the Christian theory is not.

Christians claim that God created us for a purpose — so that we can believe in him, obey him, and be saved. If this is so, it is very difficult to explain why each year millions of unborn babies naturally abort and millions of other babies are born dead or die within the first few days, months, or years of their lives. Moreover, millions of people are born and live their whole lives with severe mental retardation, unable to think even the simplest thoughts. How do all these people fit into God's supposed plan? What purpose can God have in creating a new life and then letting it die even before it is born or soon after its birth? And what happens to all these beings? Do they all go to eternal Heaven or eternal Hell? If God really created us with a plan in mind, that plan is certainly not very obvious. Further, since the majority of the people in the world are not Christian and as not even all Christians will be saved, this means that a good percentage of all the souls that God creates will go to Hell. God's supposed plan to save everyone seems to have gone terribly wrong.

9. If we are really reborn, how do Buddhists explain the increase in the world's population?

When beings die, they are reborn, but they are not necessarily reborn as the same type of being. For example, a human could be reborn as a human, as an animal, or perhaps on

some other plane of existence, according to its *karma*. The fact that there is a dramatic increase in the world's human population indicates that more animals are being reborn as humans (there has been a corresponding drop in the number of animals due to extinction, etc.), and more humans are being reborn as humans.

10. *Nirvāṇa* is an impractical goal because it takes so long to attain it and so few can do it.

It is true that attaining *nirvāṇa* may take a long time, but on the other hand, rebirth gives us plenty of time. If one does not do it in this life, one can continue striving in the next life. In fact, it may take many lifetimes. The Buddha said that, if one really wants, one can attain *nirvāṇa* within seven days (*Majjhima Nikāya*, Sutta no. 10). If this is so, Christians will ask, “why have not all Buddhists already attained *nirvāṇa*?” The answer is simple — they are still attached to mundane phenomena. As insight and understanding gradually make that attachment fade, one moves step by step towards *nirvāṇa*. As for the claim that only a few people can attain *nirvāṇa*, this is not correct. While, according to Christian doctrine, a person has one and only one chance of being saved, Buddhism's teachings on rebirth mean that a person will have an infinite number of opportunities to attain *nirvāṇa*:

*This immortal state has been attained by many and can still be attained even today by anyone who makes an effort. But not to those who do not strive. (Therīgāthā, 513.)*

11. In Christianity, history has a meaning and is moving towards a particular goal. Buddhism's cyclic view of existence means that history has no meaning and makes Buddhists fatalistic and indifferent.

It is true that, according to Buddhism, history is not moving towards any particular goal. But the individual who is following the Noble Eightfold Path certainly is. He or she is resolutely moving towards the peace and freedom of *nirvāṇa*:

*Just as the river Ganges flows, slides, tends towards the east, so too, one who cultivates and makes much of the Noble Eightfold Path flows, slides, tends towards nirvāṇa. (Saṃyutta Nikāya, Great Chapter, Sutta no. 67.)*

So, it is not true to say that Buddhism's more realistic view of existence and history necessarily leads to indifference. And what goal is history moving towards according to Christianity? The Apocalypse, where the vast majority of humanity and all that humanity has accomplished will be consumed by fire and brimstone. Even the supposed “lucky few” who are saved will have the gloomy prospect of an eternity in Heaven knowing that most of their family and friends are, at the same time, suffering eternal punishment in Hell. It would be difficult to imagine a more depressing future to look forward to than this.

12. The Buddha copied the idea of *karma* and rebirth from Hinduism.

Hinduism does teach a doctrine of *karma* and also reincarnation. However, the Hindu versions of these doctrines are very different from the Buddhist versions. For example, Hinduism teaches that we are determined by our *karma*, while Buddhism says that *karma*

only conditions us. According to Hinduism, an eternal soul (*ātman*) passes from one life to the next, while Buddhism denies that there is such a thing as an eternal soul (*anattā*), saying rather that it is a constantly changing stream of karmic energy that is reborn. These are just two of the many differences between the Hindu and Buddhist views on *karma* and rebirth.

Even if the Buddhist and Hindu teachings were identical, it would not necessarily mean that the Buddha thoughtlessly copied the ideas of others. It sometimes happens that two people, quite independently of each other, make exactly the same discovery. A good example of this is the discovery of evolution. In 1858, just before he published his famous book *The Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, Charles Darwin (1809—1882) learned that another man, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823—1913), had conceived the idea of evolution exactly as he had done. Darwin and Wallace had not copied each other's ideas; rather, by studying the same phenomena, they had come to the same conclusion about them quite independently of each other. So even if Hindu ideas about *karma* and rebirth were identical to those of Buddhism (which they are not), this would still not be proof of copying. The truth is that Hindu sages, through insights they developed in meditation, got vague ideas about *karma* and rebirth, which the Buddha later expounded more fully and correctly.

13. If Buddhism is such a great religion, why did it die out in India, the land of its birth?

We could well ask the same question about Christianity: “If the teachings of Jesus are so great, why is Christianity now only a minor religion in Israel and the other countries of the Middle East, the lands of its birth?” We could even ask, “If Jesus was really the Prince of Peace, why are Israel and Palestine probably the most violent regions in the world?” Of course, Christians would answer that things change, that with the advent of Islam, many Christians in the Middle East changed their religion so that Christianity nearly disappeared. And the same is true of Buddhism in India. Due to complex political, economic, and social reasons, many Indians who had been Buddhists gradually became Hindus.

14. Jesus forgives our sins, but Buddhism teaches that we can never escape the consequences of our *karma*.

According to Christianity, after people are born, they will live forever after — first, for a few decades at most on earth and thereafter, for eternity in either Heaven or Hell. Jesus will forgive people's sins while they live their lives on earth, but for the rest of eternity, he will refuse to do so, no matter how frequently or how pitifully the souls in Hell call upon his name. So, Jesus's forgiveness is very conditional — it is limited to a minute period of time in a person's existence, after which Jesus will withhold it. Accordingly, most people will never escape from the consequences of their supposed sins.

Can people escape their *karma*? According to the theory of *karma*, every volitional action (*karma*) has an effect (*vipāka*). However, this effect is not always equal to its cause. For example, if a person steals something, this act will have a negative effect. If, however, after the theft, the person feels remorse, returns the stolen article, and resolves to try to be more careful in the future, the negative effect of the theft will be mitigated. There will still be an effect, although it will not be as strong. But even if the thief does not mitigate the wrong that he has done by doing something good, he will be free from the deed after its effect comes to fruition. Thus, according to Buddhism, we can be free from our negative

*karma*, while, according to Christianity, our sins will only be forgiven during an extremely limited period of time.

There are other ways in which the doctrine of *karma* is superior to the Christian ideas of sin, forgiveness, and punishment. In Buddhism, while one may have to experience the negative effects of the evil one has done (which is only fair), one will experience the positive effects of the good one has done as well (which is also fair). However, this is not the case in Christianity. A non-Christian may be honest, merciful, generous, and kind, yet, despite this, at death, this person will go to Hell and not receive any reward for the good he has done. Next, according to the doctrine of *karma*, the effects that we experience, all things being equal, are in direct proportion to their cause. This is not so in Christianity — even if a person is exceptionally evil during this life, eternal Hell is an utterly disproportionate punishment. How much more is this the case if the person is good but non-Christian? Indeed, the eternity of Hell and the idea that all non-Christians are condemned to it are teachings that cast very serious doubts on the concept of a just and loving God.

15. Jesus cannot be ignored.

Christians should not attribute their feelings to others. Several billion non-Christians live their lives quite happily while ignoring Jesus! Most of them will not even give him a thought! And, if there are Buddhists and other non-Christians who pay some attention to Jesus, it is not because he, his teachings, or the claims about him are so compelling, but rather because Christians keep pushing him in everyone's face. They "market" Jesus as if he were a brand of toothpaste or laundry detergent.

*Of all the systems of religion that were ever invented, there is no more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief...it produces only atheists and fanatics.* — Thomas Paine

16. Deep down, Buddhists are really searching for God and the peace only he can give.

This is a good example of the rather silly things Christians sometimes say. It is also a completely meaningless statement. One could simply reverse it and assert, "Deep down, Christians are really searching for *nirvāṇa* and the peace only it can bring". The only thing such statements show is that Christians are incapable of accepting the reality that the majority of the world's population are not Christians and are never going to become Christians. Evangelical Christians console themselves about this truth by convincing themselves that all who reject Jesus will go to Hell and be punished as they so rightly deserve. More moderate Christians, on the other hand, console themselves by saying that non-Christians are really searching for God but have not found him yet.

*No free man needs a God.* — Vladimir Nabokov

17. Christianity started with a few simple men and, within three hundred years, had become the main religion of the Roman Empire. How could it have spread so far and so fast if it had not been part of a divine plan?

The fact that Christianity spread quickly and widely throughout the Roman Empire proves only how gullible people are and nothing more. As for spreading quickly and widely, Communism started with one unemployed man sitting in the British Library, and, within sixty years of his death, it had become the philosophical, political, and economic system that nearly one third of humanity lived by. The bizarre cult of Mormonism started with an acknowledged con-man claiming that he had received a golden book from an angel, and now it is one of the fastest growing Christian churches. The Prophet Mohammed was an illiterate merchant, and, within two hundred years, the religion he founded stretched from India to Spain and gave rise to a rich and sophisticated civilization. The Buddha was a simple ascetic who owned nothing, and, within two centuries, his teachings had spread throughout India and beyond.

18. Christianity has spread to almost every country in the world and has more followers than any other religion, so it must be true.

It is true that Christianity has spread widely, but how has this happened? Until the fifteenth century, Christianity was largely confined to Europe. After that, European explorers, soldiers, and settlers conquered and colonized much of the world, brutally forcing their religion on the people whom they conquered. In most of the conquered countries (such as, for example, Sri Lanka [Ceylon], the Philippines, Latin America, and parts of India), laws were passed banning all non-Christian religions. By the late nineteenth century, overt brute force was no longer used to enforce belief, but, under the influence of Christian missionaries, colonial administrators tried to hinder non-Christian religions as much as possible. Today, the spread of Christianity is supported by lavish financial assistance which missionaries get largely from the United States. Hence, the spread of Christianity has nothing to do with its allegedly superior doctrine, instead, it has to do with fear, power, and money.

*State churches that use government power to support themselves and force their views on persons of other faiths undermine all our civil rights... Erecting the "wall of separation between church and state", therefore, is absolutely essential to a free society.*

— Thomas Jefferson

Whether Christianity is the world's largest religion is a matter of definition. Can we consider the Mormons, the Moonies, and Jehovah's Witnesses to really be Christians? Can we consider the numerous strange cults and sects that flourish in Latin America and Africa and which account for many millions of adherents to really be Christian? Most Protestant denominations do not even consider Roman Catholics to be genuine Christians! If we exclude all the heretical, heterodox, cultic, bizarre, and loony Christian groups from being counted as "real" Christians, this would probably make Christianity one of the smallest religions in the world. This would also explain why the New Testament says that only 144,000 people will be saved on Judgment Day (Rev. 14:3—4).

19. Modern archeology has proved that the Bible is true.

This is another example of the half-truths that Christians often use to try to impress uninformed people and convert them. It is true that the Bible contains a great deal of

historical information. For example, the Book of Joshua tells us that the Israelites laid siege to the city of Jericho, but they could not penetrate its strong walls. God told them to march around the city seven times playing trumpets, then give a loud shout, and the walls would collapse. The Israelites did as they were instructed, the walls fell down, and the city was captured (Josh. 6:2—27). Archeologists have excavated the ruins of Jericho and have discovered that it did indeed have walls that had collapsed at one time. But they have not found a shred of evidence that this happened because of trumpet-playing Israelites and the intervention of God. On the contrary, the evidence shows that the walls and much of the rest of the city were destroyed by an earthquake. None of this proves the existence of God — all it shows is that ancient people mistakenly believed that natural phenomena were the doings of a divine being. Even nowadays, there are crackpot Christian televangelists who attribute all sorts of natural disasters to the wrath of God. Then, there is the story of Noah, the ark, and the flood (Gen. 6—9). There is absolutely nothing in the geological record to indicate that such an event ever took place.

*The biblical account of Noah's Ark and the Flood is perhaps the most implausible story for fundamentalists to defend. Where, for example, while loading his ark, did Noah find penguins and polar bears in Palestine?* — Judith Hayes

And, if the Bible contains some historically accurate information, so do the sacred scriptures of most other religions. The Qur'an, the Mahābhārata, the Jain scriptures, and the Buddhist scriptures are all filled with historically accurate information.

20. God blesses those who believe in him. This is why Christian countries are so rich and Buddhist countries are so poor.

Of all the arguments that Christians use to try to entice people into becoming Christian, this is by far the most foolish. First, if what the Bible says about wealth is true (Matt. 19:23—24), it would seem that the blessings which God has supposedly poured out on Europe and America are really a curse in disguise. Second, if prosperity is really proof of God's favor, it would seem that he really likes Muslims since he has given them the majority of the world's oil. Third, some Christian countries, such as Honduras and the Philippines, are extremely poor, while Japan, predominantly a Buddhist country, is very rich. Finally, by making statements like this, Christians are letting slip their real motive for worshipping God — their desire for money. Buddhism, for its part, teaches that qualities like contentment, love, gentleness, and inner peace are far more precious than money.

21. Christianity has been a force for progress, while Buddhism has done little to improve the world.

In Christianity's long history, there are some things (art, architecture, music, etc.) to be proud of and even more to be ashamed of. Take, for example, slavery — a terrible institution that almost all Christian churches supported until the nineteenth century. After Paul converted the runaway slave Oresimus to Christianity, he convinced him that, as a Christian, he should go back to his master (Philemon 1:3—20). Paul asked the master to be



kind to Oresimus, but he did not ask him to free his slave. The Bible says that slaves should obey their masters even if they are treated with cruelty:

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, single-mindedly, as if serving Christ. (Eph. 6:5.)*

*Slaves, give entire obedience to your earthly masters, not merely with an outward show of service, to curry favor with men, but with single-mindedness, out of reverence for the Lord. (Col. 3:22.)*

*Bid slaves to be submissive to their masters and give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory, nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our savior. (Tit. 2:9—10.)*

The reason why slave owners in Africa, America, Cuba, and Brazil encouraged their slaves to become Christians was to make them passive and obedient. In England, the campaign to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century was strongly opposed by the churches, and they opposed similar campaigns in Mexico, Brazil, and the southern states of America (for details, read the section “slavery” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings [13 volumes, 1908—1927]).

Next, take science. The development of science in the West was held back by church opposition (see *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* by Andrew Dickson White, the founder of Cornell University [2 volumes, 1896]). Christian opposition to the dissection of corpses held back the development of medicine and anatomy for three hundred years. The churches were against dissection because they believed that it would make bodily resurrection impossible. The church was opposed to the heliocentric view of cosmology and even threatened to torture and execute Galileo Galilei (1564—1642) for saying that the earth moved around the sun. When Benjamin Franklin (1706—1790) invented the lightning rod, which prevented buildings from being damaged by lightning, Protestant clergymen were in an uproar. They believed that God would no longer be able to punish sinners by hurling lightning bolts at them. When chloroform was invented, the churches refused to allow it to be used to alleviate the pain of childbirth. They believed that the pain of childbirth is God’s punishment on women for the sin of Eve (Gen. 3:16).

Then, there is the persecution of the Jews. Of all the dark pages in the history of Christianity, this is the darkest and most disgraceful. For two thousand years, Christians have harassed, hounded, humiliated, and murdered Jews simply because they refused to believe in Jesus. In this respect, Protestants have been no better than Catholics. In 1986, a leading Protestant clergyman in the United States said bluntly, “God does not listen when the Jews pray”. Martin Luther (1483—1546), the founder of Protestant Christianity, wrote a book called *The Jews and Their Lies* (*Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* [1543]) in which he advocated extreme persecution of the Jews on the grounds that they did not believe in Jesus. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Nazis encouraged the publishing and distribution of Luther’s book during the time that they ruled Germany. Just image it! On this matter, the hate-monger Joseph Goebbels and the Protestant pastor Martin Luther were of one mind.

We could go on and on, but perhaps this is enough. However, since the nineteenth century, it is true that many Christian churches have begun to adopt the outlook of the liberal

secular tradition and make it their own. So now, some Christians are often in the forefront of movements for justice, democracy, and equality. But there is little in the Bible that they can use to justify their actions. On the contrary, the Bible specifically says that all rulers, even the unjust, get their powers from God and to oppose them is to oppose God:

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur his judgment.* (Rom. 13:1—2; see also Jn 19:11; Tit. 3:1; Pet. 2:13; Prov. 8:15—16.)

For centuries, despotic kings, cardinals, and bishops quoted passages like these to justify their rule. Liberation theologies are very silent about such Bible passages today. The best Christian social philosophy does not come from the Bible. It comes from the Western secular tradition, which the churches spent four hundred years opposing. Now, they pretend that these values originated from Jesus (see *What the Bible Really Says*, edited by Morton Smith and R. Joseph Hoffmann [1989]).

Buddhism has always been far less aggressive and less organized than Christianity. This has meant that its influence on society has been more subtle, less coercive, and even less intrusive than Christianity. On the other hand, it has also meant that the witch-hunts against heretics, the persecution of non-believers, and the bloody religious wars that have disgraced Christian history have been rare or absent in Buddhism.

22. I have been to many Buddhist countries, and I saw little of the noble philosophy you are talking about. All I saw was the worship of spirits, monks practicing astrology, belief in the protective power of amulets and talismans, and numerous other vulgar superstitions.

It is interesting that Christians should say this since, in the United States, widely acknowledged to be a deeply Christian country, little of the noble teachings of Jesus are actually talked about. Instead, televangelists are constantly making pleas for money while drawing huge salaries, living in opulent mansions, and flying in private jets. Then, there is Jim Bakker, the famous preacher, who was sentenced to forty years imprisonment for fraud and tax evasion. And what about Jimmy Swaggart, one of the country's most well-known preachers, who lost his position when it was discovered that he visited prostitutes and read pornography? The same thing happened to the evangelical preacher Ted Haggard when it was discovered that he was engaging in homosexual sex with a male prostitute and using illegal recreational drugs. Next, there is the endless series of pedophile sex scandals and cover-ups rocking the Roman Catholic Church. Incredibly, Mormons believe that they can be married for eternity, that they must not drink tea, and that every Mormon family must keep a large stock of food in preparation for the end of the world. Throughout the Deep South, it is invariably the most "pious" people who are the most racist. White people go to white churches, and black people go to black churches. But beyond all the scandal, hypocrisy, and shenanigans, the thing that really stands out about American Christianity is the inextricable association between God and money. American Christians seem to think that achieving worldly success, wealth, adulation, and getting what you want is the first and only Commandment. Perhaps it might be a good idea for Christians to clean up their own mess before they start pointing the finger at the alleged failings of Buddhists and other non-

Christians. Jesus said it best when he advised, “You hypocrites! Remove the log from your own eye before you instruct your neighbor on how to remove the splinter from his eye” (Matt. 7:5; Lk. 6:42).

*The Christian Right today has absorbed the endemic violence in American society: they oppose reform of gun laws, for example, and support the death penalty. They never quote the Sermon on the Mount [“love thy neighbor...”; “judge not, lest ye be judged”] but base their xenophobia and aggressive theology on Revelation. — Karen Armstrong*

23. Buddhism may be a noble philosophy, but if you look at Buddhist countries, you notice that few people seem to practice it.

Perhaps! But is it not exactly the same in so-called “Christian” countries? What honest Christian can say that all who call themselves “Christian” fully, sincerely, and with deep understanding follow Jesus’s teachings? We should judge a religion on the merit of its teachings and not on the basis of those who fail to practice it — this has been our objective throughout this book. ■



# 8

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## Conclusion

Perhaps, what has been discussed in this book may stimulate readers to want to know more about Christianity and Buddhism, and so, we will briefly recommend some books for further reading. A popular book exposing many of the fallacies in Christianity is *Jesus — The Evidence* (1984) by Ian Wilson. Wilson examines the history of the Bible and shows how scholars have demonstrated beyond a doubt that it is an untidy compilation composed over several centuries. Wilson also shows how the man Jesus gradually came to be seen as a god. Another good book is *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalists* (1991) by John Shelby Spong. Spong is a Christian bishop and scholar who freely admits that much of what the Bible contains is either mythological or erroneous, and he gives abundant evidence for this. The two best scholarly and critical studies of recent times are *Is Christianity True?* (1984) by Michael Arnheim and *The Case against Christianity* (1991) by Michael Martin. These outstanding studies examine every major Christian doctrine and expose each of them to the cold light of reason. Another book, *Atheism — The Case against God* (1989) by George Smith, examines all the arguments for the existence of God and shows that they are illogical, faulty, or spurious.

*Critics of Christianity in India have frequently accused Christianity of being a predatory, imperialistic religion with absolutist tendencies, and have framed Christian evangelism as an aggressive, uncouth act. More recently, however, and in an idiom that resonates with many contemporary Indians, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930— ) has made the more controversial claim that the attempt to convert another person is itself an act of violence. — Chad Bauman*

Many excellent books on the life and teachings of the Buddha are available. A good introduction is *The Life of the Buddha* (1988) by Hammalawa Saddhatissa. It includes a well-written biography of the Buddha and a clear account of basic Buddhist concepts. *What the Buddha Taught* (1985) by Walpola Rahula and *The Buddha's Ancient Path* (1979) by Piyadassi Thera are good introductions. *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* (1988) by Gunapala Dharmasiri is an excellent but somewhat technical examination of the modern Protestant concept of God from a Buddhist point of view.

Fundamentalist, born-again, and evangelical Christianity poses a real threat to Buddhism, and, while we can never hope to match its aggressiveness or organizational abilities, we can counter them by becoming familiar with Christianity's numerous doctrinal weaknesses and Buddhism's many strengths. If the Christian challenge stimulates a deeper appreciation for the *Dhamma* in Buddhists and a desire to live by that *Dhamma*, then that challenge can benefit Buddhism. ■



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# Afterthoughts

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With this, I come to a conclusion and pronounce my judgment. I *condemn* Christianity; I bring against it the most terrible of all accusations that an accuser has ever put into words. It is, to me, the greatest of all imaginable corruptions; it seeks to work the ultimate corruption, the worst possible corruption. Christianity has left nothing untouched by its depravity; it has turned every value into worthlessness, every truth into a lie, and every integrity into baseness of soul. Let anyone dare to speak to me of its “humanitarian” blessings! To abolish pain and suffering is contrary to its doctrines; it lives by pain and suffering; it *creates* pain and suffering in order to perpetuate itself... It invented the idea of original sin. It invented the “equality of souls before God” as a cover for all that is useless and base — this explosive concept, ending in revolution, the modern idea, and the notion of overthrowing the whole social order — this is *Christian* dynamite... As for the so-called “humanitarian” blessings of Christianity, what utter nonsense! It has bred the art of self-contradiction, of self-pollution, of a will to lie at any price, of an aversion and contempt for all good and honest instincts! All this, to me, is the “humanitarianism” of Christianity! — Parasitism is the *only* practice of the church; with its anemic and “holy” ideals, sucking all the blood, all the love, all the hope out of life; the beyond as the will to deny all reality; the cross as the distinguishing mark of the most subversive conspiracy ever heard of — against health, beauty, well-being, intellect, *kindness* of soul — *against life itself*...

This eternal condemnation I shall write upon every wall: I call Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity...for which no expedient is sufficiently poisonous, secret, subversive, malevolent! I call it the one immortal shame and blemish upon the human race!

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* (1888)

If there is a God, atheism must seem to Him as less of an insult than religion.

— Edmond de Goncourt

Every sensible man, every honorable man, must hold the Christian sect in horror. — Voltaire

Religion is fundamentally opposed to everything I hold in veneration — courage, clear thinking, honesty, fairness, and, above all, love of the truth. — H. L. (Henry Louis) Mencken

I hereby state my opinion that the notion of a god is a basic superstition, that there is no evidence for the existence of any god(s), that devils, demons, angels and saints are myths, that there is no life after death, heaven nor hell, that the Pope is a dangerous, bigoted, medieval dinosaur, and that the Holy Ghost is a comic-book character worthy of laughter and derision. I accuse the Christian god of murder by allowing the Holocaust to take place ... and I condemn and vilify this mythical deity for encouraging racial prejudice and commanding the degradation of women.

— James Randi

